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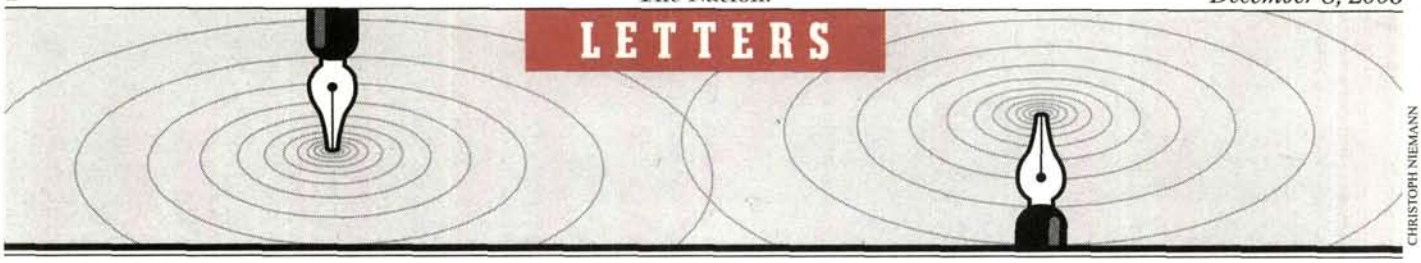

CHRISTOPH NIEMANN

TRIP DOWN (BRICK) MEMORY LANE

Los Angeles

■ Diana Abu-Jaber's review of Monica Ali's *Brick Lane* ["London Kills Me," Oct. 20], took me back to my early childhood in and around that very same Brick Lane, in the heart of London's East End. Before the area became "Bangla Town," it was haven to immigrant Jews escaping the pogroms of Eastern Europe. Today's mosques were yesterday's synagogues, and Blooms drew lines of customers for its salt-beef sandwiches. When I visited recently, I was stunned to find the building that once housed the soup kitchen being converted to high-priced condos, tureen and ladle and Hebrew lettering still carved in stone over the portal! Back then, just before World War II, it wasn't drugs that parents feared. Young rebels turned their energies against Oswald Mosley and his black-shirted fascists—and my grandmother locked her sons in the bathroom to keep them out of danger. The story goes that they climbed out the window and joined the fight anyway. MONICA MORRIS

FOREVER JONG

Great Barrington, Mass.

■ I rise to the defense of Erica Jong—not that she needs defending. What Claire Dederer omits in her interesting assessment of Jong's career ["She's Gotta Have It," Oct. 6] is that Erica is (was) also a wonderful teacher. I was her student in a poetry workshop in the 1970s, during all the *Fear of Flying* brouhaha. I found her to be outstanding, knowledgeable, focused, intellectual, funny and respectful of others' work, and with a sharp, well-honed critical sense, she was far and away one of the most liberating (in the sense of empowering others to write) teachers I have had. Although she will be remembered best for *Fear of Flying*—one of the groundbreaking books of the twentieth century—she should also be remembered for the two fine collections of poetry that preceded it: *Half-Lives* and *Fruits & Vegetables*. They established her as an important poet, destined to become a major one had she not chosen instead to write fiction.

IRENE WILLIS

WORTH MORE THAN 1,000 WORDS...

Amherst, NH

■ Photography may, indeed, be "a kind of parasite on...war, [depending] on its ability to deliver reality," as Peter Wollen says in "Shooting Wars" [Oct. 6], but it may also shape a person's perceptions and sensibilities for a lifetime. Some forty years ago, I was taken to a bookstore to select my own bar mitzvah present. Among the books I picked was a *Life* collection of World War II photos. Two photos are still as clear to me as if I were looking at them now. One shows a Russian soldier at the very moment of being fatally hit by a bullet, his body arched as if he were being suddenly yanked skyward by an invisible rope attached to his chest. The other shows a few gnarled fingers poking out from the sand (Normandy Beach?), presumably attached to a young soldier's body partially buried by the tide.

These two photos made my 12-year-old self understand, in my gut and heart as well as my head, what war means in the world of real people, not TV or newspaper headlines. Whoever those photographers were, I thank them for their ability to capture the reality of war. Any advocate of war will have to erase those photos from my memory before convincing me to support, or acquiesce to, mortal combat. BILL SIEGEL

TALES FROM THE GULAG

Olney, Md.

■ Lynne Viola loses me when she suggests the gulag's stories are best not dragged back into the light—especially, apparently, by foreigners, since she also argues it's "perhaps best left to the family, to the nation, to come to a reckoning" with it ["The Gray Zone," Oct. 13].

"As we have seen in Eastern Europe," she writes, "the 'rediscovery' of the past and the search for culprits can open up a Pandora's box, revealing much more than the human heart can absorb, as husbands, wives and friends are 'unmasked' as former government agents or informers." By that logic, a husband who embezzles from a charity should never be "unmasked" because it'd be too painful for his wife. If I was thrown into a labor camp because a "friend" ratted me out to the KGB, I doubt I'd agree the needs of my "friendship" require my KGB file stay secret. The list of those who could be unmasked, by the way, is longer and darker than "former government agents or informers." What of mass executioners, or sadistic prison camp guards? What of schemers who used dishonest testimony to get "inconvenient" neighbors and relatives hauled off to the camps?

Viola warns against portraying the cold war as a pure moral struggle, but she oversimplifies in the opposite direction: "Perhaps one can [claim the cold war was about human rights and Western values] if...one's list of modern tragedies includes the gulag, the Holocaust, the Armenian massacre, the Nanking massacre, the Chinese Cultural Revolution, the Cambodian war and the Bosnian wars, but does not extend to encompass the Atlantic slave trade and US race relations, Dresden, Hiroshima and the Vietnam War, to say nothing of the postcolonial tragedies unfolding in Africa." This is an oddly random list. (Why Dresden and Hiroshima but not the Warsaw Uprising or the Molotov-Ribbentrop pact? Why the Vietnam War but not the Soviet war in Afghanistan?) If it is offered to suggest America and the USSR had equally sordid rap sheets, it fails. Cold war America, with all its problems and injustices, its Vietnams and Bays of Pigs and, yes, crimes, was never a totalitarian dictatorship; never had a gulag. MATT BIVENS

VIOLA REPLIES

Toronto

■ I am sorry I "lost" Matt Bivens. I see he is lost enough to have incorrectly supposed that I suggest "the gulag's stories are best not dragged back into the light." This supposition could not be further from the truth. In fact, I am currently writing a book on the experience of early gulag prisoners, exploring the fate of the peasants, so-called kulaks, deported to the hinterlands in the first half of the 1930s. Bivens unfortunately missed the point of the review—that the history of the gulag should not and cannot be told as a cold war morality tale, a tale of black and white between the forces of good (the US) and evil (the USSR). It is truly a pity that Bivens is "stuck" in old cold war dualities ("If it is offered to suggest America and the USSR had equally sordid rap sheets..."—it is not so offered!). The history of the gulag is too tragic and too complex to be reduced to a competition of virtue between the US and the USSR. LYNNE VIOLA

GIVING THE OLD DEVIL HIS DUE

Tucson

■ Randall Kennedy, in his review of John D'Emilio's biography of Bayard Rustin ["From Protest to Patronage," Sept. 29], omits an important phase of Rustin's life: the 1950s, when he worked with the War Resisters League. I first knew Bayard when I was a young activist in the Fellowship of Reconciliation. After he was eased out of FOR following the California sex scandal, I was happy to work with him again in WRL, which welcomed him. He became WRL's eloquent spokesperson, traveling around the country (and singing—his voice was extraordinary and poignant) encouraging groups of war resisters to keep the faith and resist militarism, poverty, racism and all forms of bigotry. In subsequent years, as he sought acceptance in powerful neocon circles, he downplayed his nonviolent stance as he added his name to ads for jets to Israel and befriended the Kristols, Podhoretz, Jeane Kirkpatrick et al. When I last saw him, Bayard joked with me, ambivalently and a bit guiltily, and we hugged. I couldn't help loving the old devil.

ANN MORRISSETT DAVIDON

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EDITORIALS

True Sovereignty for Iraq

The quagmire in Iraq seems to deepen by the week, with the guerrilla resistance growing stronger and more sophisticated. The past month has been particularly sobering for the United States: five American helicopters downed, more than eighty American soldiers killed, and more departures among the nongovernmental organizations and international bodies needed to help in reconstruction.

In response to these events and to a new CIA report warning of the growing disaffection of the Iraqi people, the Bush Administration has unveiled an "Iraqization" strategy that moves up the date for turning over some control to an Iraqi governing body to June and that speeds up the process of training Iraqi police and security forces. Also anticipated is the first withdrawal of US troops next spring, several months before the presidential election.

The new Bush policy seems more an exercise in political expediency—an attempt to put an Iraqi face on the US occupation while preparing the way to cut and run if the going gets tough—than a serious plan for fostering Iraqi democracy, stabilizing the country or bringing US troops safely home. Indeed, as Jalal Talabani, current president of the US-appointed Governing Council, made clear to the *Washington Post*, the United States will still be pulling the strings even after the handover, with American troops remaining as "invited guests."

The Administration seems to believe it can get more Iraqis to join its efforts without ceding, in the near term, any real sovereignty. But without such sovereignty the Iraqi troops the United States is training, as well as the selected Iraqi leaders, will continue to be seen as collaborators and will have little effectiveness in repelling guerrilla attacks—whether by Saddam loyalists or by those simply opposed to the US occupation—or in establishing their own authority. As foreign policy columnist William Pfaff has recently observed, security and sovereignty cannot be separated: "You cannot have one without the other."

After having waged war on the basis of deception and outright lies, and after arrogantly rebuking the other United Nations Security Council members for their call for more international control, the Bush Administration bears responsibility for the fact that there are no good or easy options in Iraq. Those who say we must "stay the course"—even when they mean by that a genuine effort to rebuild Iraq's infrastructure and provide safety for its people—ignore the reality on the ground. American forces, especially in the Sunni triangle, are doing little to provide security for postwar reconstruction and nation-building while provoking ever-greater hostility with their expanding "search and destroy" missions. They are increasingly targets, as are those Iraqis and citizens of other nations (like the nineteen Italians who died in a recent attack) who are cooperating with the United States. More US troops will do little to change that dynamic. Indeed, if history is any guide, this is a war we cannot win, even if the guerrillas represent remnants of a despised regime and lack broad support among Iraqis.

The better, and ultimately more responsible, alternative is an immediate restoration of Iraqi sovereignty—ideally through a process overseen by the UN—combined with an orderly but rapid withdrawal of US troops. Only by setting forth a clear, firm timetable for both to be accomplished—within months—can Washington hope to break the momentum of the guerrilla war and transform the logic of the situation in Iraq from one of occupation to one of restoring self-determination. And it is only by signaling that it is willing to relinquish control—political and economic—

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that the United States can hope to re-engage the UN. This commitment to Iraqi sovereignty also means that it will be Iraqis, not the officials running Washington's crony contracting process, who determine the nature of Iraq's economic system and oversee the process of awarding contracts for reconstruction. Accompanying these changes could be a new effort to establish a truly multinational force that would provide an interim Iraqi government with assistance in reconstruction, security and preparations for elections. But these developments must be the product of, not the precondition for, the restoration of Iraqi sovereignty.

The future of Iraq should not be turned into a question of whether America has the stomach to stay the course. It is a question of giving Iraqis a chance to determine their own future, with whatever assistance they choose: the UN, the Arab League or other international bodies.

Yes, there is a danger that Iraq will slide further into chaos or civil war if US forces are withdrawn. But in our neoimperial delirium, we have forgotten one of the lessons of the twentieth century: that no people, no matter how dispirited by years of dictatorship, will tolerate occupation—whatever its intentions—for long before the occupiers themselves become the targets of revolt and the source of instability. We cannot will a stable, democratic Iraq into being, even with double or triple the US forces there now. Only the Iraqis can do that—on their own terms and in their own time.

Boston Marriage

The Massachusetts Supreme Judicial Court decision in favor of gay marriage may have set off a political earthquake, but as a matter of law it was a no-brainer. Recognizing that the state's Constitution "forbids the creation of second-class citizens," Chief Justice Margaret Marshall affirmed the "dignity and equality of all individuals" and the "right to marry the person of one's choice." Those were the words both pro- and antigay forces had been waiting for.

"This is it—the big breakthrough," said one veteran of the gay marriage movement, adding that the work has just begun. But before gays and lesbians could uncork the champagne (or, just as likely, argue among themselves over the rightful place of marriage in movement strategy) they were hit with a cascade of hysterical pronouncements, from the Family Research Council's declaration that "a tyrannical judiciary" is "redefining marriage to the point of extinction," to George W. Bush's pledge "to defend the sanctity of marriage." Will the Christian mission to manufacture an anti–gay marriage backlash work? The right seems to think so, pointing to poll numbers showing a decline in support for gay civil unions in the wake of the Supreme Court's groundbreaking *Lawrence v. Texas* "sodomy" decision this past summer.

But if progressives cast the issue in terms of fairness and equal protection, they might be able to pre-empt the backlash. That's what the leading Democratic presidential contenders have tried to do, without using the m-word, aware that the public still prefers civil unions to gay marriage. They are, however, all on record opposing the push for a gaybaiting constitutional

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COMMENT

amendment that would override the Massachusetts decision—and that will not necessarily hurt them. Supporters of the amendment have already framed it with shrill rhetoric that could turn off moderates. Perhaps sensing that risk, Bush himself has refrained for the moment from endorsing it.

While we celebrate the Massachusetts decision, it's worth recalling that the countries that have recognized same-sex marriage—Belgium, Canada and the Netherlands—are social democracies where access to healthcare and other social benefits is not contingent on marriage. Gay marriage passed in those countries without all-out cultural war in part because there was less at stake. The United States would do well to emulate them in more ways than one.

COMMENT

Why Jesse Jr. Backs Dean

ELECTION MATTERS

No single endorsement, save that of next July's party convention, will decide the winner of what remains a remarkably unsettled race for the Democratic presidential nomination. But some endorsements carry more weight than others, which explains why all the major Democratic contenders made plays for the support of Representative Jesse Jackson Jr. It also explains why Jackson's endorsement of Howard Dean, which the Illinois congressman expects to make official in early December in South Carolina, rivals Dean's securing of the Service Employees International Union and American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees union endorsements as a campaign coup. Jackson gives Dean needed street cred not just among African-American voters but also among the broader pool of progressive voters who have come to respect the 38-year-old son of the Rev. Jesse Jackson as a principled and persistent champion of peace and economic and social justice in Congress, and a fierce battler against those who would pull the Democratic Party to the right.

While many progressives still have qualms about Dean, who governed Vermont as a centrist and who critics say has evolved leftward only as it has proven beneficial to his presidential ambitions, Jackson says long conversations and campaign trips with the governor convinced him that "Howard Dean has a genuine desire to reshape the Democratic Party. He's been willing to take on the top-down Democratic Party leadership, to build a movement rather than just a campaign. It's that movement that has scared the insiders. They're fighting him right now, just like they've fought a lot of us who want to open the party up. I want to help him win that fight."

The surface assumption is that the greatest assist Jackson can offer will be among African-American voters. Other candidates, particularly Dick Gephardt and John Edwards, have attracted African-American support in key states. But with his father sitting the nomination fight out—Jackson Senior echoes his son's kind words for Dean but has not made primary endorsements since his own 1988 presidential run—the congressman could well be the best-known African-American advocate for any of the candidates. "It's no secret that the governor comes from Vermont, one of the whitest states in the union. While his campaign has done some strong outreach to people of color, I think we'll be able to do a lot more for him in urban areas and the South," explains Jackson, who plans to campaign for Dean in his own state of Illinois, the delegate-rich industrial states of the Midwest and key Southern states like South Carolina. "But I also expect to be campaigning in white communities, especially in the South. Howard Dean believes, as I do, that it is possible to get African-Americans and working-class whites together around an economic-justice agenda so powerful that they look beyond the issues the Republicans have used to divide us. That's something I've been talking about for years, and I think Howard Dean is the one candidate this year who gets it." Dean has also been endorsed by Congressional Black Caucus vice chair Sheila Jackson Lee.

Jackson, who says he was drawn to Dean initially because of the candidate's strong opposition to the Iraq war, began talking with Dean after his brother Jonathan, a Chicago businessman, endorsed Dean earlier this year. After Dean hired a well-regarded former National Rainbow Coalition aide, Andi Pringle, as a deputy campaign manager, Jackson quietly attended a speech Dean gave at Howard University in early October and then flew with him to South Carolina and watched him in action before three predominantly white audiences. "I wanted to see how he handled himself in front of different crowds," says Jackson. "I was impressed. He struck the same themes, he was clearly intent on building a broad coalition, along the lines of the Rainbow. And he was willing to take risks to do that."

Dean's risk-taking caught up with him around the time Jackson decided to back him. Dean took hard hits from his Democratic opponents for saying he wanted to be the candidate of white guys who drive pickup trucks festooned with Confederate flags. While Jackson acknowledged that Dean might have chosen his words more carefully, he applauded Dean's willingness to open the discussion about race and the Democratic Party's future. (He wrote an article defending the candidate, "Dean's *New* Southern Strategy," at www.thenation.com.) Jackson says Dean is forcing the party to be more realistic about the work that must be done to overcome racial divisions. "We have to stop kidding ourselves as Democrats: If we're ever going to become a majority party, we are going to have to start fighting to win back Southern working-class white voters," argues Jackson, who devoted much of his book *A More Perfect Union* to explaining strategies for building multiracial coalitions of economic self-interest. "All of the economic and social justice programs liberals advocate cannot be won without those Southern votes. We have to get beyond the comfort zone of Northern liberals, and that's what Dean has tried to do. When other candidates criticize him, they're showing just how stuck they are in the past."

Jackson is particularly critical of Democrats who think the South can be won simply by placing a white Southerner on the ticket. "The Bob Graham and John Edwards campaigns positioned them to be the Southern guy on the ticket," says Jackson. "That is the approach that has plagued the party for years. It is the opposite of addressing the education, healthcare and jobs issues that could build a real coalition." Jackson is

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COMMENT

dismissive of Joe Lieberman, John Kerry and Dick Gephardt, all of whom voted to authorize the Iraq war. He is more impressed with Congressional Progressive Caucus co-chair Dennis Kucinich but notes that Kucinich "has raised about $3 million so far, while Bush is going to have about $300 million. He hasn't built a campaign that gives you confidence he could beat Bush." The same, he says, goes for former Senator Carol Moseley Braun and the Rev. Al Sharpton, who has made no secret of his anger over Jackson's support for Dean. "They don't have the infrastructure to beat Bush, which has to be the number-one priority of the African-American community, the labor community, the progressive community," Jackson explains. "The more I've watched this campaign, the more I've become convinced that only Howard Dean has the infrastructure and the outrage to win."

Jackson is convinced that this infrastructure, with more than 200,000 contributors and tens of thousands of volunteers nationwide, will grow into a force capable of more than just displacing Bush. "The people Dean has brought into the process, and the people we will help him bring in, can form a whole new Democratic Party. There's no doubt that there is a struggle going on for the soul of the Democratic Party. On one side, you've got the people who have steered the party away from its passion, away from its potential to be a broad party of the poor, the working class and the struggling middle class in this country. They're the people who want to stop Howard Dean. On the other side, there are those of us who believe that a Dean win would help us reclaim not just the party but the country." JOHN NICHOLS

CALVIN TRILLIN

A Short History of Dick Cheney as Minder

At first, we thought we should be glad
To have a nanny for the lad—
Young Bush, who might be overawed,
Who'd barely even been abroad,
Who seemed to us a lightweight laddie
Who'd need a sitter sent by Daddy.

But Cheney's shop became the place
Where fantasists would make their case:
Iraqis threaten. At the least,
We'd rearrange the Middle East
And rule the world forevermore
If we just smashed them in a war.

Dick bought this bunk, and sold it, too.
He lied back then, and he's not through.
He'd fooled the rubes like you and me
Who never thought that he would be
A zealot once he got installed.
Stealth Nanny's what he should be called.

Korematsu II?

LIBERTIES

Be careful what you wish for. The Supreme Court's November 10 announcement that it will review two cases challenging the detention, at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, of foreign nationals as "enemy combatants" surprised many. The lower courts had unanimously ruled for the government. The Supreme Court rarely takes cases where the federal government has won below, and even more rarely where there has been no disagreement among the lower courts. So civil libertarians were heartened to hear that the Court had agreed to hear the cases. The detainees would probably be even more encouraged—that is, if they were allowed to know that the cases exist.

But getting the Court to grant review and winning the cases are two very different matters. The Supreme Court's past record does not inspire confidence. In times of crisis, the Court has almost always deferred to government claims of national security, no matter how unfounded—most infamously, in *Korematsu v. United States*, which upheld the internment of Japanese-Americans during World War II.

And in 1950 the Court ruled that federal courts lacked jurisdiction to review the convictions of German "enemy aliens" tried and sentenced abroad for war crimes—a decision the lower courts found determinative in the Guantánamo cases.

Why, then, did the Court even grant review? It may be that the international furor over Guantánamo was simply too widespread for the Court to duck. We are, after all, holding citizens of forty-two different countries there, incommunicado, in solitary confinement, with no hearings or charges and with no sign of release for the foreseeable future. Or the Court may have been disturbed by the Bush Administration's breathtaking assertion of unchecked authority—it contends that it can pick up foreign citizens anywhere in the world, spirit them off to Guantánamo and lock them up forever, with no court questioning its actions, and therefore without any legal limits.

Now that the Court has accepted review, the Guantánamo cases are significant for three reasons. First, they will mark the Court's first confrontation with the question of whether and to what extent wartime authority extends to the "war on terror." The extraordinary powers granted to the executive during wartime are predicated on the assumption that war is an exception to the norm. But the "war on terror," defined by the Administration as a war on all terrorist groups of potentially global reach, is a permanent condition. It is one thing to rule that in a declared war, the military can try and convict soldiers of war crimes for fighting for the enemy. But to extend that power to hold people indefinitely without trial in an undeclared and permanent war against unidentified foes would reverse the presumption that wartime powers are the exception to the norm.

Second, the cases test the boundaries of fundamental rights.

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Under constitutional and international law, the right not to be locked up arbitrarily is not restricted to those holding a US passport. Yet the government argues that because the detainees are foreigners held outside our borders, they can be deprived of their liberty without any process. The Court has often suggested that while foreign nationals within our borders are protected by the Constitution, those outside our borders are not. But surely the more defensible view is that the Constitution's limits apply wherever the government imposes its obligations on people against their will. The right of a human being not to be put behind bars without a hearing should not turn on the vagaries of whether he is held at Guantánamo Bay, Cuba, or Fort Myers, Florida. While battlefield realities may radically restrict the process that is due, it cannot be the rule that due process goes out the window whenever the government calls its initiative a "war."

Third, the Guantánamo cases involve much more than the rights of foreign nationals. The government's ultimate argument turns not on the status of the detainees but on the war power itself, which it contends bars courts from second-guessing military detentions. Under the war power, enemies are enemies, whether foreign nationals or US citizens. Thus, the government has invoked the same "enemy combatant" authority to arrest two US citizens, Yasser Hamdi and José Padilla. Given its decision to hear the Guantánamo cases, it seems likely that the Court will also address the detention of US citizens. Its decision in the Guantánamo cases may set the ground rules for all.

No judicial function is more essential to the rule of law than the obligation to decide whether a person thrown behind bars is legally detained. The danger posed by the Guantánamo cases is that the Court will shirk this most critical responsibility and relegate the detainees to a permanent lawless state. If it does so, the Guantánamo cases may go down in history as *Korematsu II*.

DAVID COLE

David Cole, The Nation*'s legal affairs correspondent, is the author of* Enemy Aliens: Double Standards and Constitutional Freedoms in the War on Terrorism *(New Press).*

Wal-Mart in China

Changsha

The signs all over the store proclaiming EVERYDAY LOW PRICES look the same (except that they're printed in Chinese), as do the neatly dressed "associates" patrolling the selling floor. Busy shoppers plucking bargains ranging from music CDs to shoes to fresh bean curd have the same determined look about them. And one other thing about Wal-Mart in China is familiar, too: The company's labor problems are making headlines.

To be sure, the All-China Federation of Trade Unions (ACFTU), which has launched a public relations campaign against Wal-Mart over the firm's refusal to let its Chinese workers unionize, does not much resemble unions in the United States (where Wal-Mart is the target of almost forty lawsuits alleging forced overtime without pay; a class-action lawsuit claiming gender discrimination; and, most recently, charges by federal prosecutors that the company has violated immigration laws by hiring undocumented workers). It is, rat her, a virtual extension of the Communist Party and the government, and the fight with the antiunion Wal-Mart does as much to showcase the labor group's own shortcomings as those of the corporation.

The labor federation is threatening to sue Wal-Mart unless the US company agrees to establish unions in its stores. Wal-Mart, for its part, maintains that officials in the central government have assured the company that it's not required to do so. Which seems a bit odd, because Article 10 of China's Trade Union Law clearly states that a union "shall be set up" in any enterprise with twenty-five or more workers. The explanation for the apparent contradiction may be that the government's desire for foreign investment and jobs trumps any concern for workers' rights. That wouldn't be surprising in the Chinese environment, where strikes are forbidden and the official labor grouping actively supports the government's efforts to block the rise of independent unions.

Wal-Mart currently has thirty-one outlets in fifteen Chinese cities, with 16,000 employees. A company spokesman declined to give sales figures, but published reports have put Wal-Mart's total revenues in China at just under $1 billion. Shoppers at the Wal-Mart Supercenter in Changsha are doing their best to raise that number. Corporate affairs manager Jiang Lichun says the store—which opened in June—is doing better than the roughly $60,000 a day originally projected. Wal-Mart has earned considerable notoriety in the United States and elsewhere by paying its workers rock-bottom wages. It's clear the company has adopted the same approach in China. Jiang won't give a figure for what the company pays in Changsha or other cities but says it's a "competitive" rate that's enough to "guarantee the workers' basic existence."

Wang Meihua (not her real name), a perky salesclerk in her mid-20s dressed in a bright red Wal-Mart polo shirt and blue jeans, says most workers earn about $84 to $96 a month. That's enough to provide spending money for a young person with no dependents, but anyone trying to support a family on that wage would indeed be existing in a most basic fashion. Wal-Mart's wage strategy sets it apart from many US and foreign firms in China, which tend to pay somewhat above local standards in order to attract and retain good workers. So how does a job at Wal-Mart compare with working for a Chinese company? The American company hires far fewer people, Wang says. "Here each person does the work of three! Our productivity is much higher," she says brightly. A question about unions stumps her. She's heard the term before but isn't too sure what a union would do. "You'd have to ask our managers about that," she says.

Wal-Mart's insistence on keeping the Chinese union out of its stores is another thing setting it apart from other foreign companies. Andrew Rothman, a former US diplomat who is now the China country head for CLSA Emerging Markets, an investment bank, says, "Most multinational companies of any size in China have a union presence, and I've not heard of it causing a problem for anybody." That's little wonder, because the federation unit at most companies confines itself to such things as organizing outings for workers or, less often, administering workers' health or unemployment insurance payments. So it may not be too much

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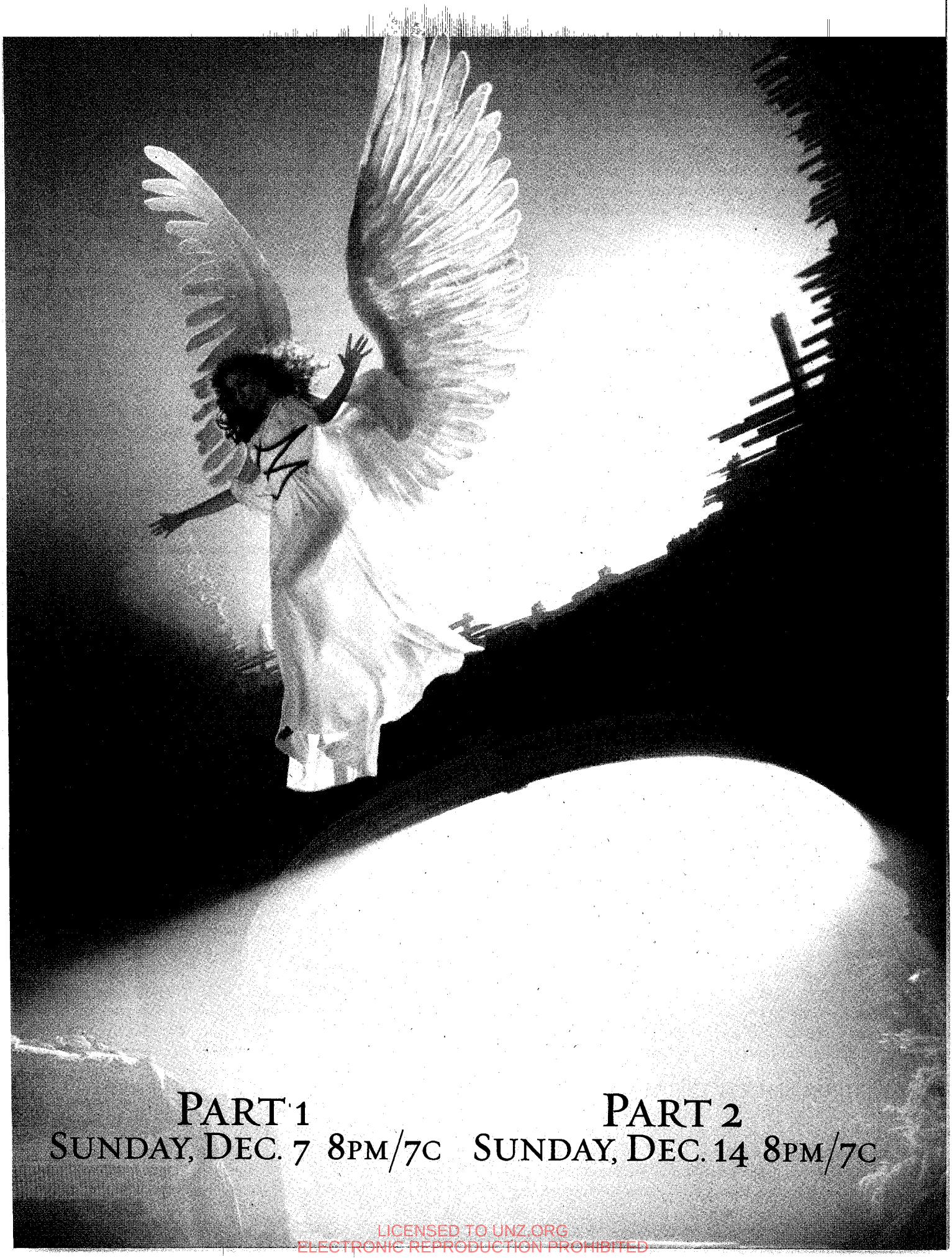

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COMMENT

of a reach to suspect that Wal-Mart's real motivation here is the desire to avoid setting a precedent that might encourage workers elsewhere. Wal-Mart spokesman Bill Wertz points out that Wal-Marts in Germany have workers' councils, as required by law. But the company's antiunion zeal is clearly fueling its impasse with the Chinese labor federation: "It's our belief that it's better for us to deal with our own associates directly rather than to have someone else come in between," says Wertz.

Wal-Mart may well have determined that some unfriendly headlines are a price worth paying if the company can stick to its bedrock antiunion principles. The labor federation, for its part, is accustomed to walking into corporate offices and cutting deals with managers—not to organizing workers. That's why labor activists in China and abroad have long regarded the official union—which claims a membership of 103 million—as part of the problem, not the solution. "The way the ACFTU operates has nothing to do with trade union principles," says labor activist Han Dongfang, who was expelled from China in 1993 for his efforts to build independent unions.

There is at least one way the ACFTU resembles its counterparts elsewhere: It needs new member dues to keep going. More than 30 million Chinese workers have lost their jobs as the old state-owned industrial base has crumbled before the competitive onslaught of foreign and domestic private firms. As a result, the federation is losing members and revenues. It can rebuild its financial base only by establishing itself in the private sector through companies like Wal-Mart.

But it will mean little for Chinese workers if the official union does thrive. The federation's role, as China evolves into a corporatist, quasi-fascist system marked by close, often corrupt, ties between government and big business, mainly comes down to preventing workers from taking their rightful place at the table. Under the best of conditions Chinese leaders would have their hands full dealing with such problems as massive urban unemployment and the flood of desperate rural laborers into the cities. Squelching workers' grievances and closing off their channels for peaceful protest can only raise the danger of massive social upheaval in the near future.

And that's got to be bad for business in a way that even profit-minded Communist Party leaders and Wal-Mart executives can understand.

CARL GOLDSTEIN

Carl Goldstein, a writer on China and Asian affairs, was based in Asia for fifteen years. He now lives in Minneapolis.

In Fact . . .

AZNAR'S PAST

■ Vicente Navarro writes: The Bush Administration is behind a bill currently in the House Committee on Financial Services to award a Congressional Gold Medal to Spanish Prime Minister José María Aznar, in gratitude for being "a staunch and steadfast ally" (i.e., supporting the Iraq war against the wishes of 90 percent of his people). He is known in America as a conservative; actually, his political roots are fascist. As a teenager he was a Falangist. His father and grandfather played prominent roles in the Franco regime. Aznar denounced the town of Guernica for renaming General Franco Square as Liberty Square after the dictator's death. Spain's Supreme Court, appointed by Aznar's government, refuses to expunge the criminal convictions of executed opponents of the Franco dictatorship. Aznar defied the instructions of a UN Human Rights agency to find the bodies of the more than 30,000 people who disappeared under Franco. He is president of the Popular Party, founded by Manuel Fraga Iribarne, Information Minister under Franco. Fraga recently wrote a prologue to a book denying the Holocaust. He was Aznar's mentor and anointed him as his successor. To award Aznar Congress's highest honor would insult the soldiers who died during World War II in the fight against fascism.

HAL LEVENTHAL HOOTENANNY

■ Gene Santoro writes: On November 29 a tribute to Harold Leventhal will be presented at Carnegie Hall by Arlo Guthrie, featuring Guthrie, the Weavers, Peter, Paul & Mary, and Theodore Bikel; the proceeds benefit the Woody Guthrie Foundation and Archives, which Leventhal helped form. During his sixty-five-year music-biz career, Leventhal pushed the postwar folk boom and broadened the audience for its dissident ideas. Born in Ellenville, New York, in 1919, Leventhal became a high school political activist. During World War II he served in the Signal Corps in India, where he befriended Gandhi and Nehru. In polarized postwar America, Leventhal saw Lead Belly, Woody Guthrie, Pete Seeger and Josh White as the populist voices of progressive ideals and organized rallies and concerts featuring them. From 1950 he managed the Weavers, and during the Red Scare became the folkie left's commercial strategist, piloting blacklisted musicians through McCarthyism. In 1955 he reunited the Weavers, launching the folk-revival wave that washed into the 1960s. He produced plays and movies, including *Wasn't That a Time*, *Alice's Restaurant* and *Bound for Glory*. And he helped *The Nation* stage several events, including a memorable one at the Village Gate for the last Democratic convention in New York (ticket information: 212-247-7800; www.woodyguthrie. org).

DANTO HONORED

■ A book by Arthur C. Danto, *The Nation*'s art critic, has received an important award in France. *The Madonna of the Future*, a collection of essays, most of which appeared in this magazine, won the Prix Philosophie. The winner is chosen by a jury representing high cultural institutions in France.

THIS WEEK ON THE WEB

■ Sarah Anderson writes from the streets and the suites at the FTAA meetings/protests in Miami. Plus new weblogs and *Doonesbury*'s take on Ann Coulter (www.thenation.com).

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ALEXANDER COCKBURN

The London Trip of a Global Tyrant

London

This city has been the November host of a global tyrant, on whose rampages the sun never sets. His name is not George Bush but Rupert Murdoch.

Bush, acknowledged as their legitimately elected leader by at least some of his fellow citizens, presents so frail a political physique that it seems faintly ludicrous to impose on him even the conventional honorific "leader of the free world," let alone the robust dignity of "tyrant."

The President's arrival in the United Kingdom was preceded by interviews with British newspapers in which he paid humble respect to those democratic traditions permitting Britons to assemble in vast numbers and to cover him with ridicule and abuse. He allowed himself to be scheduled for a possibly humiliating session with relatives of British soldiers killed in Iraq.

The entire state visit, the first by a US President since Woodrow Wilson visited these shores in 1918, has been depicted in virtually every newspaper as a political embarrassment to Prime Minister Tony Blair, who issued the invitation many months ago, when he supposed that the two could preen over a successful operation in Iraq. It most certainly represents a low point in esteem here for the United States, at least as a nation led by a man regarded by a third of all Britons as perilously ignorant, running neck and neck with North Korea's Kim Jong Il as a threat to world peace.

How different has been the brief tour of his British assets by Rupert Murdoch, on hand to crush a rising by some shareholders in British Sky Broadcasting, who claim the company is being run by Murdoch as a private fiefdom in a manner injurious to their interests.

At BSkyB's annual general meeting on November 14, Murdoch conducted himself in a manner that would have won the approval of Vlad the Impaler, snarling at one dissident that if he didn't like it he should sell his shares, and bickering openly with BSkyB's chief executive, his son James. Investors, irked by a share price dead in the water for six years and virtually nothing offered in the way of dividends, did make their views clear. Murdoch was quoted by the *Independent*'s Jeremy Warner as complaining to his wife at the end of the session that some had been "bloody insulting" and "seriously nasty," but he carried the day, at least for now.

The global tyrant still had time that day to grant an interview to the BBC in which he placed Tony Blair on notice that the loyalty of Murdoch's newspapers was not to be taken for granted. Referring to himself respectfully in the first person plural, Murdoch was kind enough to intimate that "we will not quickly forget the courage of Tony Blair" but then made haste to emphasize that he also enjoys friendly relations with the new Tory leader, Michael Howard.

On the mind of the global pirate is a topic one would have thought he'd have scant interest in, namely national sovereignty. Murdoch professed himself exercised by the matter of the EU Constitution. Slipping on the mantle of Britishness, Murdoch pronounced, "I don't like the idea of any more abdication of our sovereignty in economic affairs or anything else."

The *Guardian* found this altogether too brazen and editorialized that "Rupert Murdoch is no more British than George W. Bush. Once upon a time, it is true, he was an Australian with Scottish antecedents. But some time ago he came to the view that his citizenship was an inconvenience and resolved to exchange it for an American passport. He does not live in this country and it is not clear that he is entitled to use 'we' in any meaningful sense of shared endeavor. To be lectured on sovereignty by someone who junked his own citizenship for commercial expediency is an irony to which Mr Murdoch is evidently blind."

Then the *Guardian* got a bit rougher: "Readers have been put on notice that the views expressed in Murdoch titles have not been freely arrived at on the basis of normal journalistic considerations."

For a very extended gloss on what the *Guardian* editorialist was driving at, we can turn to *The Murdoch Archipelago* (just published by Simon & Schuster in Britain) by Bruce Page, a distinguished Australian-raised journalist who has lived and worked in England for many years, perhaps best known for his work leading the "Insight" team at the (pre-Murdoch) London *Sunday Times*. Page's detailed and compelling case, based on his investigation of Murdoch's operations in Australia, Britain, the United States and China, amounts to this: As an international operator, Murdoch offers his target governments a privatized version of a state propaganda service, manipulated without scruple and with no regard for truth. His price takes the form of vast government favors such as tax breaks, regulatory relief, monopoly markets and so forth. The propaganda is undertaken with the utmost cynicism, whether it's the stentorian fake populism and soft porn in Britain's *Sun* and *News of the World*, or shameless bootlicking of the butchers of Tiananmen Square.

There was something so megalomanic about Murdoch's interview with the BBC that one wonders hopefully whether it has all gone to his head and soon he'll be gnawing the carpet like other moguls before him. Probably not. Murdoch is too focused a predator for the wasteful extravagances of insanity, and he's perhaps a shade more careful than his fellow media czar, Conrad Black, now in the midst of eviction from control of his empire because sufficiently powerful stockholders took a dim view of Black and colleagues' easing $73.7 million out of Hollinger under the guise of noncompetition fees.

The *Sun* won a White House interview with George Bush, probably as a consequence of desperate pleading from 10 Downing Street to 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue. Robert Thomson, editor of the (Murdoch-owned) London *Times*, was invited to meet Bush at the White House November 12, a week before Bush's flight to London but, so the *Financial Times* later reported, had to send regrets. He'd already promised to attend a party in London hosted by Murdoch, the annual gathering of his top seventy global executives. As the *FT* asked, "Well, what would you do?" ■

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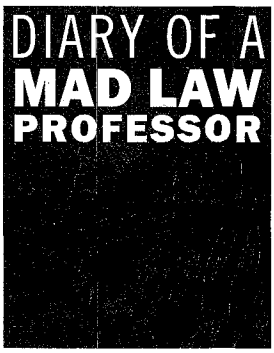
PATRICIA J. WILLIAMS

Reason for Doubt



"I wouldn't ask him to escort my daughter to her senior prom," explained one of the jurors who in mid-November acquitted Robert Durst of murdering his quarrelsome neighbor, Morris Black. Durst, of course, is the eccentric heir to a billion-dollar real estate business, a man who, according to the *New York Times*, spent time "living on the cheap disguised as a woman" while running from the law. The trail of weirdness that stretches behind him like the tail of a particularly bright comet includes "the unsolved disappearance of his first wife; the unsolved murder of his confidante in Los Angeles; a secret second marriage; a fatal shooting and a grisly cover-up; a nationwide manhunt that ended with a shoplifting arrest."

The case itself was not a complicated one in the annals of criminal law. Durst maintained that Black pointed a gun at him, that he tried to defend himself but the gun went off and Black was shot in the head and died. Since Black's head has never been found, jurors were deprived of the forensic clues that might have settled exactly how the death occurred. This made the case against Durst somewhat circumstantial, always confounding to prosecutors in their attempt to prove murder rather than accident. There were no witnesses, the evidence was ambiguous, and, most damning of all, the victim was by all accounts an odd, edgy man with no immediate relatives to weep for him in the front row of the gallery.

It must be said that Durst, too, is an odd, unsympathetic character—estranged from his family and linked with one too many wives or acquaintances gone unaccountably missing or dead. No one showed up to weep for him in the courtroom either. Indeed, this case attracted attention not just because the Durst family is as rich and well positioned in the New York social scene as Sunny and Claus von Bülow before them but because Durst actually confessed to dismembering Black's body. Panic drove him to it, Durst says, and panic advised him further to chuck the pieces and parts into the nearest body of water, where most of them were found bobbing sometime later. His lawyer is on record reflecting that "Bob was horrified at some of the things he did."

At this complicated media-hysterical and media-historical moment, there are lots of people looking to the Kobe Bryant case or the Washington sniper trials for elucidation of the American justice system's shortcomings. For my money, I think the Durst trial is a fascinating test of the principles of neutrality to which all of us aspire. Thus, I will pass over the cheap 'n' easy complaints that if Durst had been poor... If Durst had been black... If Durst had been poor *and* black...

In other words, I will pass right over the question of whether Durst is or isn't the white O.J. and move straight to the question of truth. Our system of justice is heavily inflected by rules of evidence that came of age during a time when it was hoped that the scientific method could be applied to the social sciences, and that outcomes, whether decided by judges or juries, could be relied upon as accurate measures of penalty and consequence. But the death of Morris Black is a bit like one of those events that bedevil sciences of all sorts. You're pretty sure that an unknown virus is one part of a vector of causes in the outbreak of a mysterious medical syndrome, but no one can prove it. There's a certain pattern of clues, but no smoking gun. The easy response is to want to throw the Robert Dursts of the world behind bars just to be on the safe side, to make overgeneralizations that may or may not be true—as long as there's any, even a low, chance of connection. Jail! Quarantine! Shoot first, ask questions later!

In a world of deadly risk, however, we must remember three things. First, that overreaction can be just as disastrous as underreaction. Second, that when science does not provide satisfactory explanations for insidious phenomena we do not generally contemplate throwing out the scientific method as easily as I sometimes sense we are willing to dispense with due process when it does not immediately deliver us a head. Third, that chronology always has a silent hand in the determination of what we call truth: We all understand that when we panic, the logic of *now* foreshortens other rationales. But it is perhaps a subtler and more difficult reality that time itself can be controlled by human or technological guile, and thus control the truth. In the Rodney King beating trial, for example, when the police officers' lawyers were able to freeze the videotape of the blows of the billy clubs to a series of single, still frames, a very different story was told from when the tape was played at normal speed. Similarly, when Durst or his team of lawyers was able to convince jurors that the butchering of Black's body occurred only after Black was accidentally killed, then the killing itself became dismembered from the dismemberment, which was in turn temporally removed from the definition of murder. To top it all off, chopping up bodies after death is only a misdemeanor in Texas, way below jumping bail and stealing a chicken salad sandwich—the charges for which Durst was most recently arrested—and presumably why prosecutors didn't even bother charging Durst with defacing a corpse.

Which brings us, fourth and finally, to the question of community standards. "Durst isn't the only crazy person in Galveston," shrugged one of the acquitting jurors. It was an interesting summation: the crazy-as-norm measure of behavior, judged by a locality that's apparently seen it all. Galveston, the juror implied, is a community so filled with crazies that chopping up a neighbor's body, triple-wrapping the pieces in garbage bags and dropping them into the gulf is just, like, the same old same old. The kind of stuff that gets you disqualified from the senior prom but not sent to the pokey for anything like serious time.

And that, I fear, does bring me back to the deep, hard version of those earlier questions: What tests of our notions of the neutrality of due process would be revealed if Durst had been poor, or black, or perceived as a white O.J., playing the system for everything it's worth? ■

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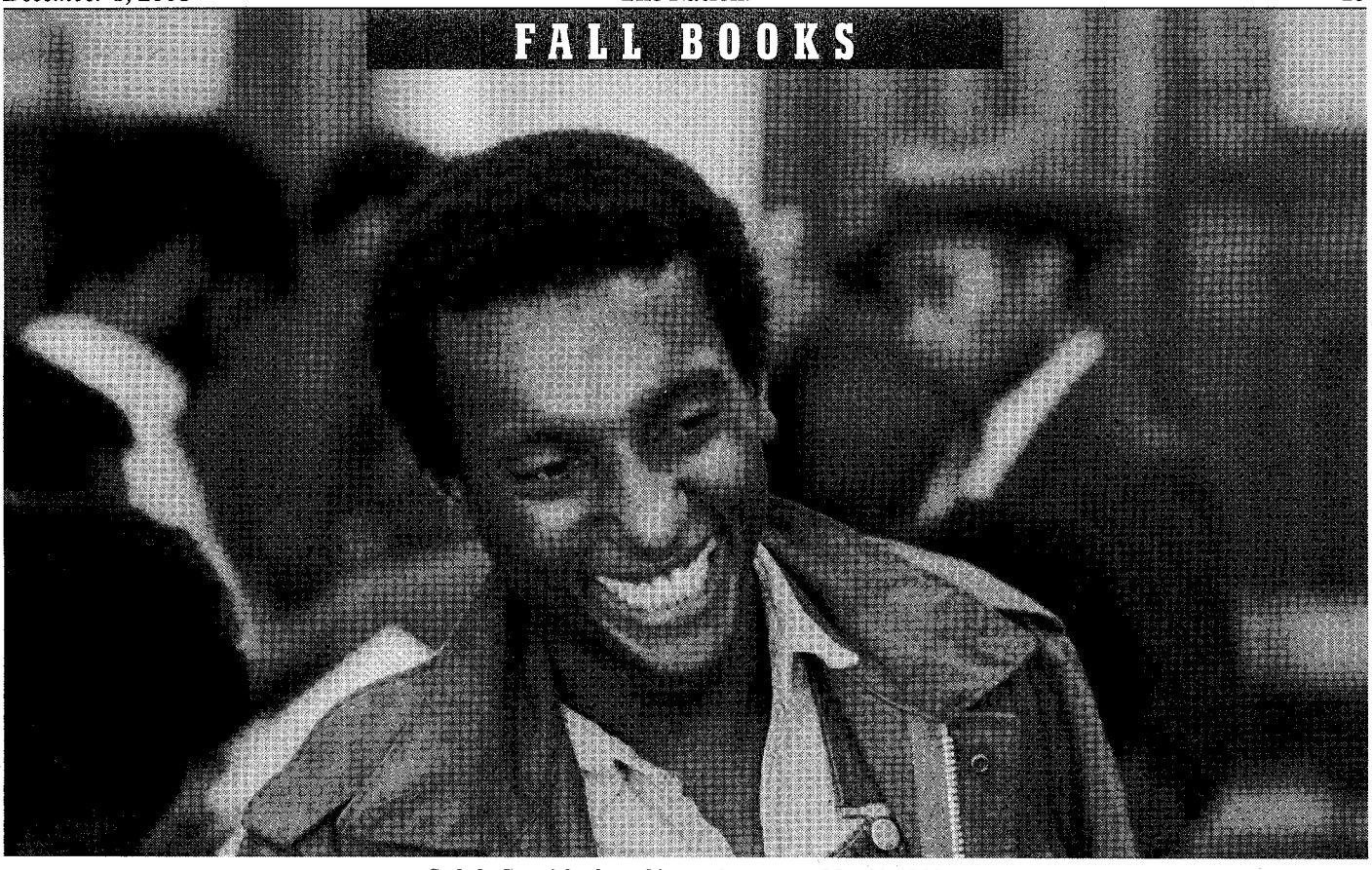
FALL BOOKS



BETTMANN/CORBIS

Stokely Carmichael speaking to the press on May 23, 1966.

Memoirs of a Revolutionist

NORMAN KELLEY

READY FOR REVOLUTION: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture). By Stokely Carmichael With Ekwueme Michael Thelwell. Scribner. 848 pp. $35.

Who can recall the late Stokely Carmichael's first name and not associate it with the two most incendiary words of the 1960s, Black Power? Carmichael was one of many individuals present at the creation of the black student movement, the formation of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC), the civil rights struggles of the Deep South and the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party. He was also one of the movement's most polarizing figures. In the eyes of many civil rights activists, especially white liberals, it was Carmichael more than anyone who contributed to the dissolution of the grand alliance—civil rights Negroes, labor, church, liberals and the Democratic Party—that sent the movement crashing into Black Power, thereby provoking white backlash. But for others, like Carmichael himself and many blacks of that era, it was time for "black liberation" and not token integration.

For better or for worse, Carmichael's legacy is primarily associated with that Molotov cocktail phrase, and in many ways he is emblematic of the black left's decision to "serve the people," as SNCC activists did in the South. Yet the former head of SNCC and the "prime minister" of the Black Panther Party helped usher in a new era of black politics that moved away from problem-solving in favor of "symbolic" or "expressive" politics. This form of politics, in which either the ideology of blackness or

Norman Kelley's latest book is A Phat Death *(Akashic), a novel. His next nonfiction book,* The Head Negro in Charge Syndrome, *will be published next year by Nation Books.*

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flamboyant rhetorical skills replaced organizing and programs, has been the guiding principle of what purports to be black politics since the late 1960s. One only needs to look at the likes of Jesse Jackson, Louis Farrakhan and Al Sharpton to judge its effectiveness.

Carmichael, who died at his home in Guinea in 1998 as Kwame Ture, has posthumously left a chronicle of his life and times, *Ready for Revolution: The Life and Struggles of Stokely Carmichael (Kwame Ture)*, "co-authored" by an old running buddy and comrade, the Jamaican-born novelist Ekwueme Michael Thelwell. In a surprisingly muted and engaging tone and style, the late activist recounts his childhood, political coming of age and being "ready for revolution." Perhaps because he knew that he was stricken with a terminal disease, Carmichael is quite gracious toward those whom years ago he would have denounced as "Uncle Toms" at the raising of a clenched fist. He peppers the storytelling with African-American colloquialisms and excursions into patois that echo his native Trinidad, the South, the street, the church and the bush. Reading the book, in fact, is like sitting down with the last of the "grand old men" of the movement and having him give you the back-story as to what was going on. It adds to the historical record the memoirs of a legendary but later reclusive historical actor. It is passionate about politics and struggle, poignant in regard to Carmichael's love, respect and admiration for ordinary black folk ("mah people, mah people"), and he is dead-up hilarious in describing the twists and turns on the road to revolution, though evasive and delusional in other matters.

Born in 1941 to working-class, West Indian parents (father a carpenter, mother a seamstress) who hailed from Trinidad and moved to New York, Carmichael was a nonnative American citizen, an outsider in his adoptive home. Yet as a son of the African diaspora he was also a part of a tradition to which Afro-Caribbeans had contributed mightily, the tradition of black radicalism that also numbered men like Marcus Garvey, C.L.R. James, George Padmore, Martinique's Aimé Césaire and Frantz Fanon, Puerto Rico's Arturo Schomburg and women like Malcolm X's mother, who was also a West Indian. Unlike segregated African-Americans, Caribbeans like Carmichael's parents had grown up in majority-black countries where they hadn't been totally indoctrinated into accepting a subservient position. Although most of the British Caribbean world would not be decolonized until the 1960s, Afro-Caribbeans, as British subjects, were used to running at least some aspects of their own show. They had had, in other words, a taste of power.

Growing up in Trinidad, Carmichael didn't see much of his parents, who moved to New York in search of work when he was 3, leaving him in the care of his grandmother. The only son of Mabel and Adolphus Carmichael, he was dubbed "little man" because of his dapper Sunday best outfit. In 1952, after the death of their grandmother, he and his sisters arrived in New York City, where they were reunited with their parents, who had had two more daughters. In his memoir, he remembers wondering:

> What would living with my real mother be like? I was, you know, not familiar with the term *nuclear family*. In fact, the whole concept as defined in the West would have been contrary to the reality of the African extended family that I'd experienced at home or observed in the community. But that is what we Carmichaels were going to be now, a nuclear family.

Having left behind their large, spacious house in Trinidad, built by Adolphus Carmichael and his friends, Stokely and his sisters were introduced to New York apartment living, Bronx style, at 861 Stebbins Avenue. At first he thought the huge apartment building was their home. His parents laughed at his naïveté, but he soon discovered the joys of sleeping on the couch after years of having his own room. Later, the family settled in Morris Park, a predominantly white working-class neighborhood of the Bronx. The Americanization of Stokely Carmichael was largely uneventful, it seems. He became involved in the usual high jinks of young boys: nearly jumping out of a window upon watching too much *Superman* on TV after being cooped up all summer long; making zip guns; hanging out with gangs. An intellectually precocious child, he found American education a breeze compared with the British-based rigors he'd experienced in the Trinidadian school system.

By Carmichael's account, his introduction to radical politics didn't occur in SNCC but at Bronx Science, a magnet high school where he met young Communists, notably Gene Dennis, the son of a prominent Communist who had been imprisoned under the Smith Act. Although their friendship and Carmichael's inclusion in New York's left-wing social world (where he sang "Hava Nagila" at parties)

> did not begin my political interest, it certainly focused it in a certain direction—the tradition of European radical writing and revolutionary theory. For the first time I encountered a systematic radical analysis, a critical context and vocabulary that explained and made sense of history. It explained the inequities and injustice I'd long been conscious of in the society around me and prescribed (even predicted) revolutionary solutions.

Yet he always felt that something was missing from American socialism, namely the black side of things. In other words, he was struck that this "systematic radical analysis" was rooted in the European experience and did not give much credence to or adequately present the black experience; it was "quite narrowly focused." Thinkers like C.L.R. James and George Padmore were dismissed as "Trotskyists" or renegades. Thus, he never joined any Communist or socialist organization.

The roots of Carmichael's transformation into Kwame Ture can be traced, rather, to Harlem's 125th Street, where he was introduced to the "stepladder" speakers, black orators who exhorted Harlemites from stepladders about blacks' history and their present predicament. Not only did he learn the history of black struggle and resistance; he picked up an important lesson: "the influence of style."

> Important elements of my adult speaking style—the techniques of public speaking in the dramatic African tradition of the spoken word, can be traced to these street corner orators of Harlem. To them and the Baptist preachers of the rural South.

This would serve Carmichael well, for much of his legacy is rooted in the militant posturing and rhetoric of the post–civil rights period that began after 1965. While this style can exhort some blacks to great sacrifice against entrenched white supremacy, it often comes up short as a means of conveying the complexities of the world. It may explain why black politics often has a surfeit of charismatic leaders with authoritarian leanings; most black leadership has come out of the church (King, Adam Clayton Powell) or other quasi-religious groups like the Nation of Islam (Elijah Muhammad, Malcolm X, Louis Farrakhan).

While studying at Howard University, Carmichael became, at 19, one of the youngest Freedom Riders during the early 1960s campaigns. A member of that

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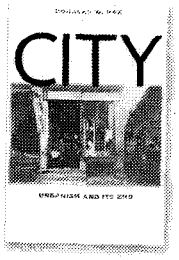

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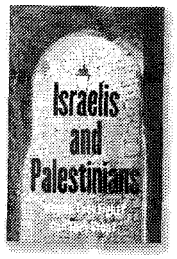

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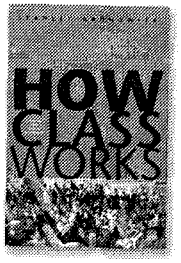

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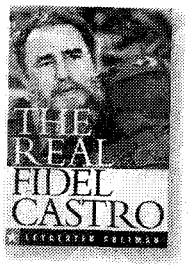

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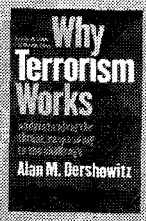

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school's Nonviolent Action Group (NAG), affiliated with SNCC, he joined a second wave of Freedom Riders in response to a first wave who had been brutally attacked while riding buses through the South. Arrested in Mississippi for attempting to integrate the trains, Carmichael and others, including CORE's James Farmer, spent more than a month in jail, first at Hinds County jail and then at the notorious Parchman Prison Farm. Suffering forms of torture that would have been denounced by Human Rights Watch had it existed then, he emerged as something of a celebrity and began to gain experience and exposure as a spokesman for the movement. This was needed to raise public awareness and money, but it also sowed the seeds of some SNCC members' cynicism toward "totalitarian liberals."

> It was disjunctive, almost schizoid, and as it turned out, a token of things to come. Later, with us in SNCC, the same contradictions would surface. We'd be sending young field-workers, some of them coming out of hardscrabble sharecropper poverty, into trappings of enormous wealth and power, there to tell moving tales—we called them "war stories"—of our people's suffering and resistance. It was classic Americana, shades of runaway darkies and northern audiences.

Yet for every song and dance that was required by such liberals, there was a Harry Belafonte (another Caribbean!) who counseled and supported SNCC activists with no strings attached.

Nothing, however, produced greater ire toward liberals for the young activist than the cynical machinations of the Kennedy/Johnson Administration. Kennedy owed his narrow victory to the support of black voters, whom he had wooed during his campaign by calling Coretta King to express his concern over her husband's incarceration at a famously brutal Georgia prison. Yet President Kennedy and his Attorney General brother often treated the civil rights activists as if *they* were the violent racist segregationists depriving people of their rights. Carmichael took especial umbrage at Robert Kennedy's remark equating the freedom riders with the racists who attacked them as "extremists on both sides."

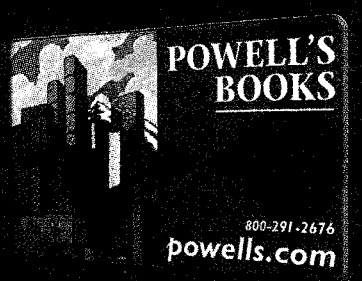
The Administration wanted the debacle of the Freedom Rides off the front page and into less confrontational, decisively backpage activities: voter registration. Carmichael argues that the "South's 4 million disenfranchised blacks might help offset" the loss of white Democratic votes. However, as a tactic and strategy for organizing black people, he felt that SNCC couldn't refuse the offer.

This tactic and strategy was largely successful and marked the beginning of the rise of post–civil rights black elected officials; but it also led to the unquestioning absorption of the black vote into the Democratic Party. And Carmichael was also front and center at the further manipulation of the Mississippi Freedom Democratic Party by the Democratic Party. The roots of SNCC's radical change were grounded in its constant dealings with cautious white liberals, the opportunism of the Democratic Party and the fanatically entrenched racism of white Southerners (who mostly became Republicans later). Even Malcolm X, in his classic attack on the "farce on Washington," saw how the Kennedy Administration was trying to blunt the radical thrust of the "Negro revolution"—and SNCC was the tip of that arrow.

The great and admirable thing about SNCC was its willingness to go where action was needed and help ordinary black folk in places like Mississippi, Alabama and Cambridge, Maryland. Where King's SCLC emphasized moral suasion and hit-and-run demonstrations, SNCC—a cadre of organizers rooted in local communities working jointly with home-grown local leaders—preferred direct action to press for desegregation and voting rights. They were the "outside agitators" constantly denounced by unreconstructed Southerners who knew and understood "their" nigras better than any goddamn pointy-headed nigra intellectual. When one goes back and reads the chronicles of the civil rights era in such books as Taylor Branch's *Parting the Waters* and *Pillar of Fire*, David Garrow's *Bearing the Cross*, John Dittmer's *Local People* and Clayborne Carson's *In Struggle*, one is struck by the extent to which the South remained, more than a half-century after Reconstruction, a closed, virtually totalitarian society, especially in regard to the control and restriction of the black population in the region's "Black Belt" counties, notably those in Mississippi. Isolated and often miseducated into accepting white domination and violence as if it were the natural order of things, these communities were in desperate need of outside intervention.

The cry of Black Power, which Carmichael first used in 1966 at a Mississippi march that picked up from James Meredith's aborted "march" against fear after Meredith was wounded, put an issue on the table that neither whites nor

One gift is worth a thousand words.



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"responsible" blacks wanted to address. People may have gotten upset that Black Power upended the etiquette of the civil rights movement, but Carmichael and SNCC had begun to question the efficacy of civil rights legislation and alliances when masses of blacks in the South and the Northern ghettos were still trapped in second-class citizenship and poverty. Carmichael and SNCC realized the upshot of what was transpiring: Blacks essentially had no ability to redress these grievances if they constantly appealed to white conscience and had to rely on the federal government. Hence they needed something that whites had, namely power, but a black version of it. However, the cry of Black Power was also a retreat from the kind of pivotal organizing work—voter registration, freedom schools, political mobilization—that SNCC had been carrying out in the bowels of the South. By encouraging a cult of the gun, which originally began as Malcolm X's legitimate call for black self-defense against racist violence, Black Power also opened the floodgates to undisciplined, even violent forms of protest that militant groups were unequipped to control. In cities like Watts, Newark and Detroit, urban blacks were showing what they meant by the slogan. In the parlance of soul music, a cultural contemporary of Black Power, "Papa had a brand new bag." Yet Black Power advocates like Carmichael were powerless to defend poor blacks against state repression, or channel black rage into a constructive political agenda. According to Carmichael, he had argued against the Panthers being characterized as a "revolutionary vanguard" because it would bring the heat of the state on black youths—and it did.

To a certain degree, opponents of Black Power, notably Bayard Rustin, were right in seeing Black Power as a cry of frustration, a throwing in of the towel, relinquishing programmatic endeavors that SNCC had been engaged in. Carmichael's 1967 book, *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation* (written with Columbia University political scientist Charles Hamilton), failed to articulate a plan or program beyond blacks banding together to get their own act together. Internally, SNCC was unable to control what it had started, since as an organization it had constantly vacillated between trying to be an organization with some structure and one with none and no leadership. As with most New Left organizations, the latter tendency won out.

There's a point in *Ready for Revolution*'s narrative where Carmichael recedes and his alter ego, Kwame Ture, takes over. Ture (Carmichael's name since the 1970s) takes issue with the depiction of whites being booted out of SNCC or its ever being an integrated organization. He practically denies that there were whites in the organization because those who were melanin-challenged were not really "white" in the traditional sense of the word. Hence "our comrades stopped being 'white'" and thus could not have been expelled, booted out or made to leave. "So I meant it as a sincere compliment when I said there were no 'white' people on the SNCC staff." However, Dittmer's excellent *Local People* states that in December 1966 "SNCC had voted, narrowly, to expel all whites from the organization."

Instead of leading to black political independence, Carmichael's version of Black Power produced Kwanzaa and Afrocentricity.

This kind of dissembling is to be expected of Ture. After all, he spent the last thirty years of his life in Guinea organizing for a Pan-African revolution that never bore any fruit—except, possibly, more Pan-African conferences. As Ture, he waxes hagiographic over his two African "fathers," his namesakes Kwame Nkrumah, the deposed president of Ghana, and Ahmed Sekou Touré, the president of Guinea, an African nation that devolved into a textbook example of despotism, an appalling caricature of the very Pan-Africanism that Ture espoused. These men, in Ture's eyes, could do no wrong, and the only time he's critical of African leaders—"hustlers, poseurs, and charlatans"—is when he's describing some of the liberationists holding up in Dar es Salaam, Tanzania, not Guinea. Ture alludes to the outcome in Guinea as the intrigues of foreign powers and the government's mismanagement of the economy. Thus the party (i.e., President Touré) had to "defend the revolution by any means necessary," but that line of reasoning usually justifies the carnage of internal repression.

While he doesn't exactly skim over his marriage to the South African singer Miriam Makeba, he doesn't reveal much about this remarkable woman or their relationship. As an "older woman," Makeba was the mango of young Carmichael's eye. Yet the passages in the book, like those about Nkrumah and Touré, read as one more paean to another glorious African, mythic but not very soulful or insightful. In fact, he's rather naïve about the consequences of Makeba's marrying him. When they were married, her American shows were canceled. A veteran target of racist attacks, who'd seen whites economically sabotage blacks in the South, he writes, unbelievably: "I could never have imagined my enemies would be so ruthless or so thorough. And so quick. I mean, the *day* after we got married? How low could you go?" The culprits, however, are only identified by innuendo. "Only one organized interest group comes to mind. But I have no hard evidence. And we don't want to indulge in conspiracy peddling, now do we? But it's pretty clear." He doesn't say, but could it be the "J people," the coreligionists of the people with whom he once sang "Hava Nagila"?

Carmichael and SNCC's brilliant organizational efforts in Mississippi and Alabama laid the foundation for developing an independent black political base, but they were tossed aside for the rhetoric of revolution. Instead of organizing or thinking through the problem of organizing for "hard" power—voting, economics, political representation—Carmichael began preaching a "soft" form of power: black cultural nationalism. In fairness, this was important, given that African-Americans had been systematically brainwashed into hating themselves.

Yet Carmichael's legacy of Black Power consciousness, along with that of Maulana Ron Karenga's cultural nationalist group US (i.e., "us" against "them"), had an unintended consequence. It spawned a racialized political mindset, a sort of "black orthodoxy," in which some African-Americans, especially those who reside at the bottom of the social well, tend not to think critically of those who engage in Head Negro In Charge (HNIC) politics at their expense. It has produced Kwanzaa and Afrocentricity rather than black political independence. Since the black elite has disengaged from mass-action politics over the past thirty years, the black rank and file has increasingly listened to Jackson, Farrakhan and HNIC wannabes like Al Sharpton (not to mention hip-hop mogul Russell Simmons, who is simultaneously selling sneakers and reparations). These men have eschewed a programmatic agenda in favor of a black-at-the-table politics that masks a private agenda of personal aggrandizement. They may wave the red, black and green flag of black unity, but, as Courtland Cox, one of Carmichael's comrades, said, "Blackness is necessary. But it is not sufficient." ■

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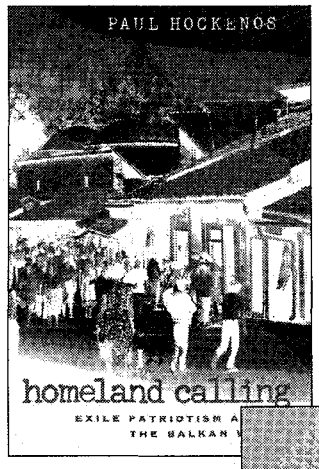

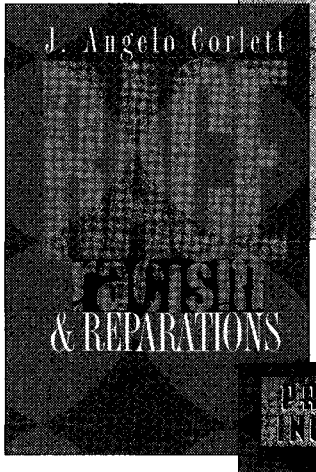

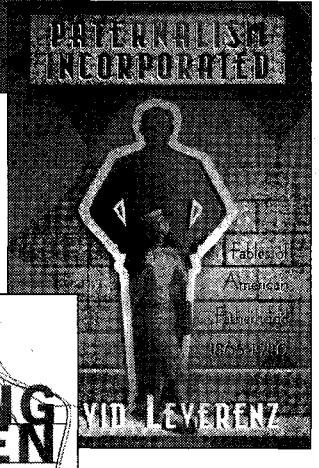

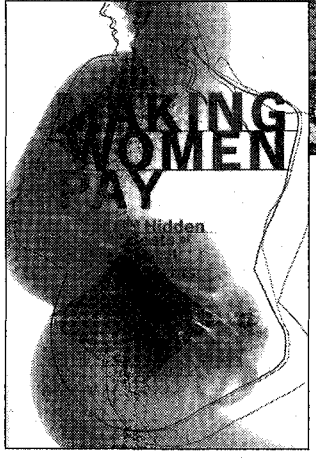

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Murder, She Wrote

KERA BOLONIK

BEAUTIFUL SHADOW: A Life of Patricia Highsmith. By Andrew Wilson. Bloomsbury. 534 pp. $32.50.

HIGHSMITH: A Romance of the 1950s. By Marijane Meaker. Cleis. 207 pp. Paper $14.95.

On the page, Patricia Highsmith could inspire a law-abiding citizen to become a willing accomplice to murder, at least within the realm of the imagination. Her fiction features ordinary protagonists with whom one readily identifies, though they are often unlikable and elicit from readers (and from other characters within the narrative) a mixture of desire and repulsion. As we gain access to their psyches and get caught up in their extraordinarily hapless predicaments, we find the moral ground slowly shifting. Before we know it, we're colluding with them, hoping they will get away with theft, deceit, even murder. Her most infamous creation is the slick, charismatic, insinuating and unconscionable Tom Ripley, who covets other people's station in life, and kills to appropriate it for himself. In all five books in the Ripley series, you can't help but root for the antihero as he lies, kills—and slips away without a trace.

Off the page, Highsmith—who is the subject of two new biographical works—was as disquieting, seductive and complex as any of the people she invented. Both English journalist Andrew Wilson, author of the exhaustive biography *Beautiful Shadow*, and novelist Marijane Meaker, who has written a memoir of her ex-lover and friend, show that Highsmith was at once spiteful and endearing, erudite and crass, a cantankerous, stingy, alcoholic misanthrope who could charm people with her mordant wit, modesty and disarming vulnerability. Highsmith seemed to revel in these contradictions. She was a refined, brooding butch lesbian who frequented the various West Village underground gay bars during the McCarthy era, but favored the social company of men. She was romantically promiscuous, struggling by turns with feelings of loneliness and claustrophobia that propelled her in and out of relationships. A Texas native, she was a fierce critic of postwar US culture and foreign policy, and would go into self-imposed exile in Europe in 1963. Highsmith was vehemently opposed to US involvement in the war in Vietnam and later became outspoken in her support for Palestinian liberation. For all her solidarity with the wretched of the earth, however, Highsmith harbored a deep admiration for Margaret Thatcher and cast votes in absentia for Richard Nixon, George Bush Sr. and Ross Perot. She was an anti-Semite and a racist, as well as a serious devotee of Jewish writers Franz Kafka and Saul Bellow, and counted many Jews among her close friends, including newspaper columnist Ben Zion Goldberg, Arthur Koestler and artist Lil Picard.

As intensely guarded as she was about her personal life, she was, to the benefit of her future biographers, an ardent and brutally honest chronicler of her innermost thoughts and experiences. Highsmith, who died in 1995, left behind close to forty journals—her "*cahiers*," as she called them—where she documented all her ideas (the genesis and progression of most of her fiction can be found in these pages). She was also a prolific correspondent and diarist, leaving behind countless letters and personal journals describing a lifelong battle with depression, and evoking fraught, often tumultuous relationships with friends, business associates, lovers and her mother, Mary Coates Highsmith, a woman who cast the longest-lasting—and most detrimental—shadow on her.

Born Mary Patricia Plangman in Fort Worth, Texas, in 1921 to parents whose brief marriage had unraveled nine days earlier, Patricia Highsmith believed she was destined for a miserable existence, remembering her young self as an "alert, anxious-faced child over whom hangs already the grey-black spirit of doom." Her mother, an illustrator, would remarry a commercial artist, Stanley Highsmith, in 1924, a man the young "Pat" soon came to resent. Before she was 10, she was already relishing fantasies about murdering her stepfather for coming between her and her mother. She would later write in her *cahiers*, "I learned to live with a grievous and murderous hatred very early on. And learned to stifle also my more positive emotions. All this probably caused my propensity to write bloodthirsty stories of murder and violence."

Her parents' career ambitions brought the Highsmiths to New York City in the late 1920s, but a mixture of economic strife brought on by the Depression, as well as ongoing marital problems, would periodically force them to return to Texas. In 1933 Mary left her second husband, taking her young daughter with her to Fort Worth. But a few short weeks later, Stanley came to retrieve his wife, leaving Highsmith behind with her grandmother. She would never forgive her mother for the yearlong abandonment. Mary was tempestuous and emotionally abusive, and according to Meaker, "had once made the mistake of telling Pat, in a joking manner, that probably the reason Pat loved the smell of turpentine was that she had swallowed some in an attempt to abort her." When Highsmith was 14, Mary asked her daughter, "Are you a les? You are beginning to make noises like one." Wilson writes that these remarks made Highsmith feel "more alienated and introverted" and that in retrospect, Highsmith felt that if "Mary really cared about her... surely she would have attempted to help."

As Highsmith grew older, her mother became increasingly sinister, and may have been suffering from an early onset of dementia. Wilson portrays Mary as a merciless critic, dismissing her adult daughter as pretentious and elitist. She was disrespectful of Highsmith's work, even though she was the dedicatee of two books, and unapologetic when she lost a copy of the manuscript for *The Talented Mr. Ripley*. A manipulative and meddlesome presence in Highsmith's life, she would often phone and write to Meaker to complain about the women in her daughter's life, lovers and friends alike. Mother and daughter would stop all communication in the 1970s, but even in her absence, Mary continued to haunt Highsmith. "Mary Highsmith was never far from her mind, particularly as Pat looked back on her life," writes Meaker. "Pat's bitterness over her relationship with her mother was almost as relentless as her fury at the Jews."

Highsmith was mistrustful of kind women, choosing instead to seek out the ornery, the disparaging, the unpredictable, the absolutely inaccessible—in other words, she pursued women like mom, and consciously or not, set the transference into play. Her friend Lil Picard was "bossy and proprietary" in Meaker's estimation, and sociologist Ellen Hill, with whom Highsmith had a tormented relationship for years, was prac-

Kera Bolonik is a writer living in Brooklyn.

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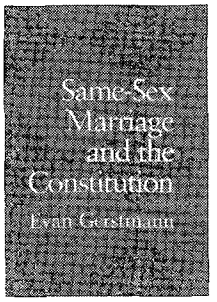

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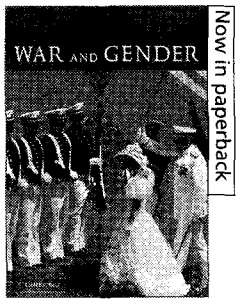

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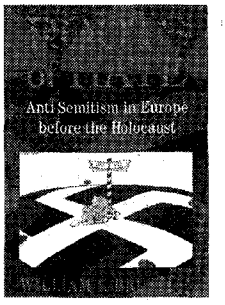

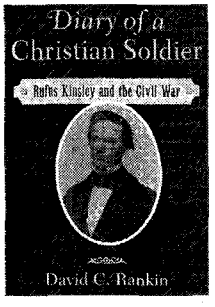

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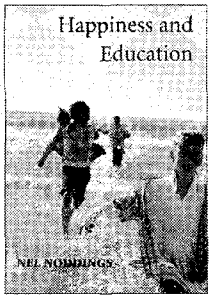

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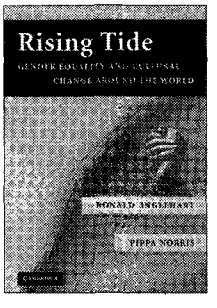

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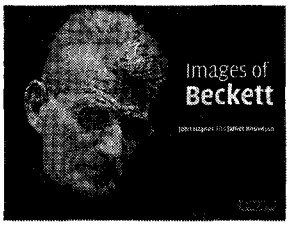

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tically interchangeable with Mary. Wilson and Meaker both depict her as icy, needy and eager to belittle Highsmith.

In Wilson's book, where most infatuations blend into one another in an indistinguishable hodgepodge of torturous conquests, Hill is the one lover to emerge as a fully realized person. Highsmith was romantically prolific, and a biographer has to be judicious, but too many important girlfriends get lost in the "beautiful shadows," as it were, including Meaker. Wilson appreciates the importance of women in Highsmith's life—for example, he intuits that it was her obsession with a married woman, and not merely her growing disillusionment with things American, that led her to move to Europe in 1963. He even interviewed the daughter of the woman who unwittingly inspired Highsmith's pseudonymous lesbian 1952 novel, *The Price of Salt* (later published under the author's name, and retitled *Carol*). But he has a tendency to get mired in long, overwritten passages that establish historical background for readers to understand the world in which Highsmith lived. This is especially apparent in earlier chapters, where Wilson needlessly describes the New York sights young Highsmith may have seen, or popular books she may have read. He also goes to great lengths to rehash each of her novels and the ensuing critical response both in the United States and in Europe, book by book, critic by critic. A thorough researcher does not necessarily make for a discerning writer, though he does include plenty of necessary and delectably strange details about his subject, her penny-pinching (she drove nearly a hundred miles to save money on a jar of spaghetti sauce) and her fascination with snail-breeding (Highsmith had more than 300 live snails, becoming so fond of her little pets that she'd smuggle them—thirty at a time—under her breasts as she traveled between England and France).

Wilson excels, however, at evoking the author's frustration with the publishing industry and her reception here and in Europe. Highsmith experienced early success with the publication of her 1950 debut novel, *Strangers on a Train*, with a boost from Alfred Hitchcock, who adapted it to the screen the following year, hiring detective novelist Raymond Chandler to write the screenplay. Hitchcock's was ultimately a far tamer version of Highsmith's story: Hers featured both men carrying out a crisscross murder scheme; the filmmaker, opting for a more moralistic route, had only one man actually committing a murder.

Strangers put Highsmith on the map as a mystery novelist, but this was something of a curse, since she wanted to see her finely crafted stories and novels considered alongside Dostoyevsky, Kafka, Camus and Poe. Being trapped in a genre certainly kept her stories out of the publication in which she most longed to appear during her lifetime, *The New Yorker* (which published her story "The Trouble With Mrs. Blynn" posthumously, in 2002); instead, hers were regularly featured in publications like *Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine*.

Being a mystery writer also set Highsmith up to disappoint and confuse the general American reader, who didn't take kindly to the moral challenges she posed in her fiction. She was one of a handful of high-minded noir writers, like Chester Himes, David Goodis and Jim Thompson, who proved to be too dark to be appreciated in their own time by American readers, instead finding their audience in Europe. Highsmith consistently garnered praise from her critics on both sides of the Atlantic throughout her career for her rare insight into the criminal mind and her intricate plotting. But commercial success would almost always elude her, especially in Britain and the United States, where her books would rarely sell more than 9,000 copies.

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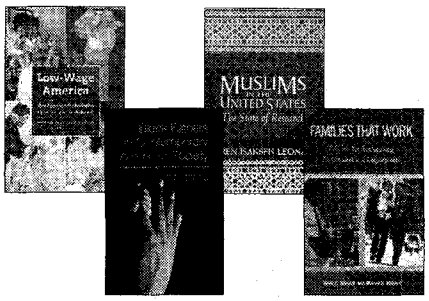

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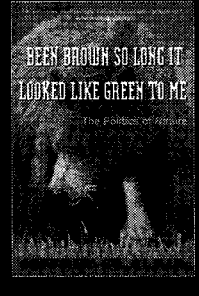

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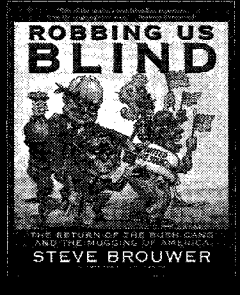

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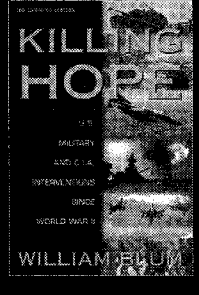

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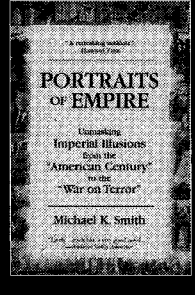

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(The Ripley series was the exception, inspiring films by René Clément, Wim Wenders and Anthony Minghella.)

Highsmith wasn't about to let sales affect her literary vision. Writing was her life—not only a means to navigate the world but the very thing that got her out of bed in the morning, her escape from heartache and depression. She rarely sacrificed her industrious writing schedule, even when she was drinking heavily. Instead, she tried to change her luck by switching literary representation, which she did several times, from her first agent Margot Johnson, whom Wilson says she fired because "she believed she just wasn't working hard enough to sell her books and raise her advances," to Patricia Schartle at McIntosh & Otis in the United States and A.M. Heath in England, two agencies that worked together, representing Highsmith for more than twenty years. When Highsmith began to take an active role in managing her financial affairs later in life, she became obsessed with her earnings and decided she didn't want to pay their respective commissions. "The latter two agents take 5% each on German, Italian, Scandinavian, etc. sales, causing me to lose 20% instead of 10%," wrote Highsmith in a letter to her friend Alain Oulman. "With double taxation arriving or creeping, I cannot afford this."

Schartle was infuriated by the allegations that both McIntosh & Otis and A.M. Heath were fleecing Highsmith, and subsequently fired her client. Highsmith had already burned a number of bridges on both sides of the Atlantic with her paranoiac demands and stinginess, and had no one to represent her in the States or in Britain. She resolved to reassign all of her literary management over to Diogenes Verlag, her Swiss publisher, who to this day serves as the executor of her literary estate.

If Highsmith was unfair to her agents, she also bore grudges against the US publishing industry, which she believed to be disloyal to her and her huge body of work. She was constantly moving from house to house—Harper & Row, Doubleday, Alfred A. Knopf, the Atlantic Monthly Press and the Mysterious Press—in search of a contract. Editors with whom she worked for years would have to reject projects because publishers didn't know how to market her properly, as she was a hybrid of heady, high art and genre fiction. Gary Fisketjon, her editor at the Atlantic Monthly Press and Knopf, said, "She defied categorization, but was temptingly close to fitting into the category of mystery and she had a cynicism about human transactions that wasn't particularly user-friendly." Fisketjon had to pass on her last novel, *Small g: a Summer Idyll*, which features a story line about a young gay man who is tricked by his doctor into believing he is HIV-positive. "In the best of all possible worlds it would be published as a young title, but the lunatic right-wing fringe that's running this country wouldn't have that," he said.

Fisketjon's rejection marked the end of the line for Highsmith, who would be without an American publisher for the rest of her life. It was "a final symbolic gesture summing up the uneasy relationship between the displaced writer and the country of her birth," writes Wilson. He cites a lament by Neil Gordon, writing in this magazine, that America "denied her…her painful and complicated insight into guilt and denial—much as her characters deny their guilt. That leaves her, so to speak, denied in the unconscious of our literature much like the guilt is denied in her characters: always present, never cured, never acknowledged and never understood."

'I learned to live with a grievous and murderous hatred early on,' wrote Highsmith. She turned that hatred into brilliantly twisted art.

The demonstrated lack of enthusiasm by American publishers ultimately wore on Highsmith. Meaker thinks it exacerbated her anti-Semitism, as Highsmith believed most of the publishing industry was Jewish. Highsmith railed against her American publisher Otto Penzler, who removed her dedication to the Palestinians in her novel *People Who Knock on the Door*, and even her first editor, Joan Kahn at Harper & Row. "Christ, what a little dictator she was! That whole family of Jews thought they were God's gift to publishing…like so many of that tribe," she said to Meaker on their last visit in 1988. Meaker's portrayal of Highsmith can be sympathetic, even tender, but she doesn't shy away from depicting her former lover as a racist and anti-Semite. By contrast, Wilson is more than halfway through his biography before delving into her virulent anti-Semitism. Perhaps it cast a sharper impression on Meaker because she had to put up with her incendiary remarks in person. Meaker became so exasperated with Highsmith's merciless rants during their last encounter that she told her she sounded "like someone with an obsessive-compulsive disorder. You can't go for long without bringing up the Jews, just as someone has to compulsively wash their hands, or go back three steps."

In a way, Highsmith's anti-Semitism is emblematic of everything that was at war within the mind of this extraordinarily conflicted woman. Many of the women she loved, the friends she cherished and the writers who inspired her art were Jewish. Yet her dislike of Jews dates as far back as her elementary school years in New York City, and as she got older and increasingly more paranoid, her anti-Semitism became more acute, possibly a symptom of her neurosis.

Throughout *Beautiful Shadow*, Wilson makes a daring case for recognizing Highsmith as a political writer, arguing that her grim vision was as shaped by the world's turmoil as it was by her own. With its depictions of people coming undone against the pressures of conformity and harboring various paranoiac fantasies, Highsmith's fiction, he argues, responded to what she perceived as the hypocrisies and perversions of cold war America. It's an interesting argument but something of a stretch: As politically feisty as Highsmith was, and as much as she may have wished to imbue her literature with a political consciousness, she hardly touched on the affairs of the world in her novels and stories. The passion that underlay her opinions—which could seem abitrary at times, and were often as unpredictable as her temperament—was doubtless genuine. She was an avid reader of books and newspapers, and even as she became increasingly isolated, she kept herself apprised of current events. Her zealousness, however, was more an expression of her displaced fury than of altruistic concern for the oppressed. Highsmith was always an armchair activist whose principal weapon was her acid tongue. In fact, her single letter to the editor (a response to William Safire's attack on Gore Vidal's 1986 *Nation* essay about Israel and the American right) appeared in the *International Herald Tribune*, under the pseudonym "Edgar S. Sallich of Brione, Switzerland." The neuroses and murderous fantasies of Highsmith's fiction were born of her own internal struggles, particularly with her mother, not of the cold war.

Meaker, who is in a position to know, doesn't remember Highsmith as a politico, per se, just as outspoken. "From what Pat wrote me about her life," she says, "she had never been a part of any political group or movement." Meaker portrays her as a devoted cat lover and dedicated friend, a social creature who balanced work and play with ease. But we also see how prone she was to riling others with bawdy jokes

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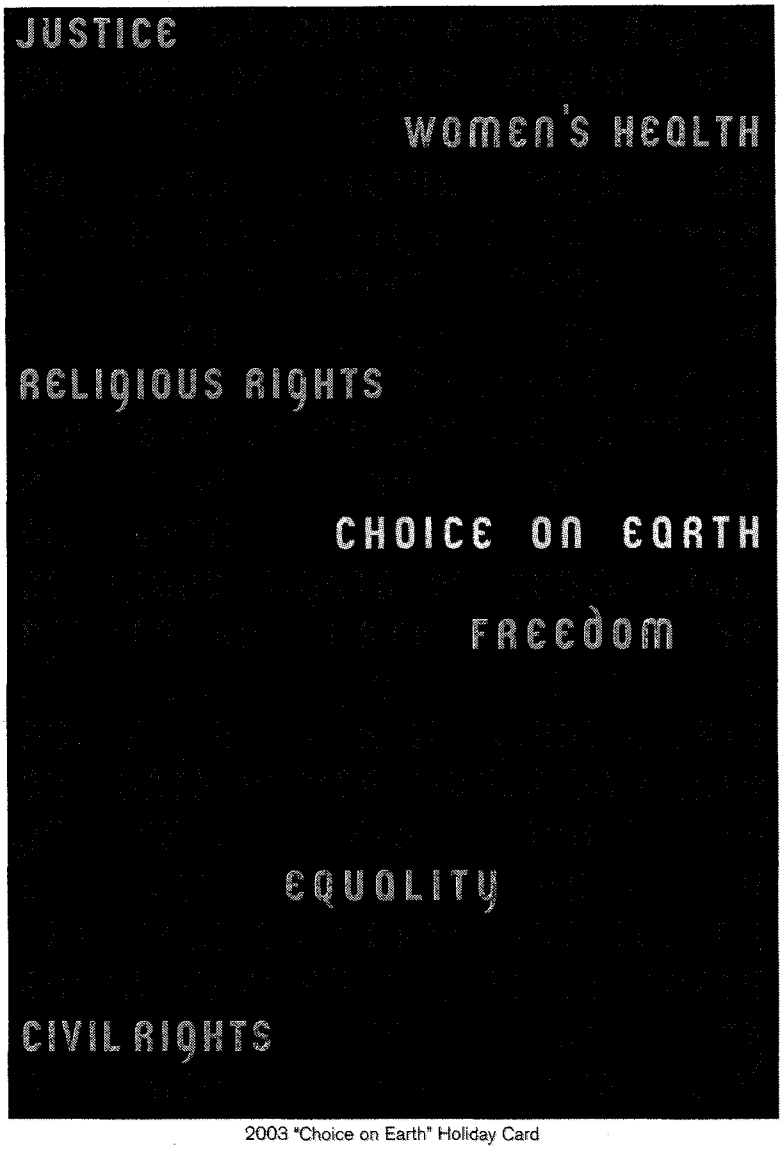

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and, especially after a few drinks, provocative, occasionally racist or anti-Semitic comments. Her charms would eventually wear away with age (and a potent mixture of inner rage and alcohol), only to be replaced by unbounded cruelty. Amazingly, her writing never suffered—it only got better. ■

The Name of Love

ADAM HASLETT

THE CITY AND THE PILLAR. By Gore Vidal. Vintage. 207 pp. Paper $13.

In January 1948 Dutton brought out the third novel of a promising young writer named Gore Vidal. The publishing house was nervous. Vidal had already reached a national audience with his first book, *Williwaw*, based on his experience in World War II, and the year before had been photographed for *Life* magazine in a feature on young writers. At the mere age of 21, he had made a name for himself, and Dutton wanted to preserve it. The cause of their queasy stomachs lay in the fact that the book they were releasing, *The City and the Pillar*, was at the time arguably the most explicit and uncompromising novel about homosexuality ever to be published in the English-speaking world. E.M. Forster's *Maurice*, written some fifty years earlier, wouldn't see the light of day until the 1970s, after its author's death. In France, Proust and Gide had certainly broached the subject but even there the leap into the floridly detailed world of Jean Genet wouldn't come until *Our Lady of the Flowers* was more broadly issued by Gallimard in 1951. And it wasn't just that *The City and the Pillar* was sexually explicit (though unlike Genet, tame by today's standards). It also failed to subscribe to the pejorative wisdom that homosexuals were desperate and perverse people who dressed hair by day and lurked in alleyways by night. This book was about the love of a shy, handsome, all-American high school athlete for his equally athletic, all-American classmate. Would the sky fall?

As it happened, reaction took a form that has come to characterize much of Vidal's career, not just as a novelist but as a playwright, essayist and polemicist: media controversy tinged with moral outrage and good sales. The *New York Times* refused to review the novel because of its content, but it ended up on the bestseller list anyway, joined that year by Orwell's *1984*, Mailer's *The Naked and the Dead* and Capote's *Other Voices, Other Rooms*. In the half-century or more since *The City and the Pillar* was published, Vidal, raised by his senator grandfather to be a senator himself and perhaps one day the President, has become instead a kind of permanent dissident-in-exile, relentlessly criticizing American political culture and mores, often in the pages of this magazine.

The novel, an early nail in the coffin of his political career, has remained more or less continuously in print until recently, and has now once again been reissued. As an account of one young man's struggle to make sense of his desire for other men, it remains remarkably salient, capturing the anxieties of American masculinity that to this day mark adolescence and young adulthood in this country and that provide the political fuel for the opposition to gay rights. And though flawed in ways as a work of fiction, the book, especially in its final scenes, contains a pathos that signals it is more than a piece of social documentary and is in fact the work of a willful and even brave young novelist.

Our entry into the world of the hero, Jim Willard, comes through a device that could have been taken from a 1940s film noir: A drunk man in the back corner of a Times Square bar stares into a glass of whiskey, a ruined expression playing across his face. When a prostitute approaches, he toys with her somewhat meanly, then scares her off. Trying not to remember, he takes another swallow, as the jukebox plays. The scene fades and rises again on a leafy spring afternoon in Virginia. In the film, a legend would appear at the bottom of the screen: "Six years earlier..." True to form, the novel will end back in this bar just under 200 pages later, the causes of the man's condition laid bare.

While the films of D.W. Griffith had begun to inform literary narrative by the 1940s, it's not until this period that a generation of writers who watched movies as teenagers comes of age, and with this we see a deepening of the influence. The framing device of recalled memory is hardly a Hollywood invention, and yet the style in which it's done here presages a filmic trait that runs throughout the book. Characters, deftly painted from the outside, will be types rather than fully crafted individuals. Over the course of the novel we meet the tough, womanizing sailor, the narcissistic movie star, the tortured writer and, first and most dear to Jim Willard, the plain-spoken high school jock.

Even the hero is not prone to introspection, and one aspect of his conflict consists of his being a type himself—the shy, handsome athlete, whose desires draw him into a gay demimonde that is unsure just how to categorize him. Is he trade, i.e., gay for pay? A tourist bound eventually into marriage and a return to the closet? None of those who fall in love with him, male or female, can quite tell. While by the end of the book it is clear that Jim is a lover of men and not women, the problem the novel explores is, in a way, one of classification: If you are a man sexually attracted to other men, must you therefore label and understand yourself as queer or gay?

Of the latter term, Vidal wrote in his 1995 memoir *Palimpsest*, it is "the weirdly inappropriate word used to describe a nonexistent category." If the popular novels of E. Lynn Harris and this summer's *New York Times Magazine* cover story on "down-low culture" are any indication, there are a significant number of African-American men who are none too keen on the term either. Many married white men who sleep with guys avoid the label as well. Despite the emergence over the past thirty years of a powerful civil rights movement for gay rights, the fact is that the category remains more a cultural identification and a locus of institution-building than an exhaustive description of same-sex desire as actually practiced.

And this is one of the things that makes *The City and the Pillar* so interesting to read today. Written well before the emergence of identity politics, it has no a priori commitment to the telos of its hero's self-understanding. It's a story of a young man coming to terms with his homosexuality, yet it isn't a coming-out novel. What Vidal gives us instead is a tale of idealized love and a quiet, apparently well-ordered obsession that in the end turns violent. Not a love that dare not speak its name but a love that desperately doesn't want a name that wants the bliss of innocence to carry over into adulthood.

Adam Haslett's first collection of stories, You Are Not a Stranger Here *(Anchor), was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize and for the National Book Award.*

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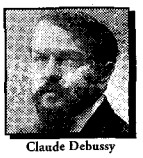
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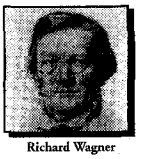
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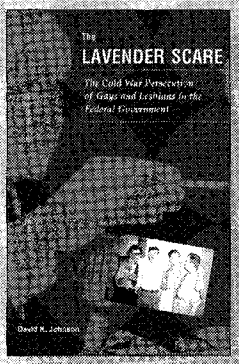

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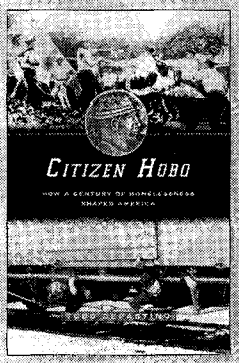

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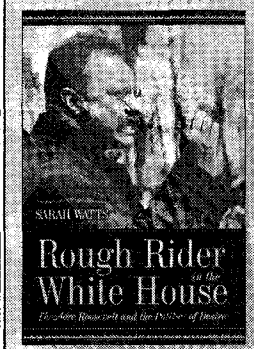

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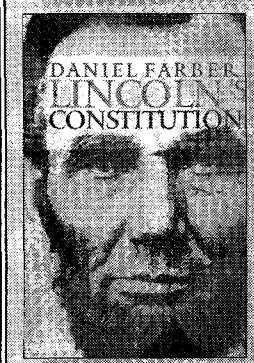

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This lingering memory of young love has its seeds in the author's own youth. While a weekly boarder at St. Albans prep school, Vidal became friends with a boy named Jimmie Trimble. As 13- and 14-year-olds, they had an adolescent love affair, fooling around together at school or at Vidal's house overlooking the Potomac. Soon Vidal was shipped off to another school and the two didn't meet again until they were 17, at a formal dance. "Our bodies still fitted perfectly together, as we promptly discovered inside one of the cubicles [of the men's room], standing up, belly to belly, talking of girls and marriage and coming simultaneously," Vidal recalls in his memoir.

Two years later Trimble died at the battle of Iwo Jima. Vidal returned from the war and began a career as a writer. In *Palimpsest*, he devotes long sections to Trimble and says he was the one true love of his life, a twin never to be found again. Vidal has spent the past fifty years involved with the same man but says sex has played no part in their relationship. His adolescent affair with Trimble was apparently for him the one and only time sexual and emotional life were joined.

The specter of the dead friend and lover is no doubt the psychic engine that drives *The City and the Pillar*, though not in the obvious autobiographical ways one might imagine. Rather, Vidal, showing at 21 the signs that he was probably destined to be a writer and not a politician, performs the quintessentially literary act of forcefully reshaping his own world and experience into a new form, one that can forge meaning out of loss. Trimble is resurrected in the novel as Bob Ford; he is made to survive the war; and thus Vidal is able to have Jim Willard meet his love once again.

Their first brief idyll takes place at an old slave cabin on a riverbank. Bob, a year ahead of Jim, has just graduated from high school and is about to sign up for the merchant marine. On this final summer weekend, they spend a day and night fishing, swimming and wrestling together in splendid isolation from the outside world. In this mini–state of nature, the boys frolic naked. While Bob appears unselfconscious of the fact, Jim "tried to fix the image of Bob permanently in his mind, as if this might be the last time they would ever see one another. Point by point, he memorized him: wide shoulders, narrow buttocks, slim legs, curved sex." By the fire that evening they wrestle once more and then comes the moment when the wrestling stops:

> As faces touched, Bob gave a shuddering sigh and gripped Jim tightly in his arms. Now they were complete, each became the other, as their bodies collided with a primal violence, like to like, metal to magnet, half to half and the whole restored.
>
> So they met. Eyes tight shut against an irrelevant world. A wind warm and sudden shook all the trees, scattered the fire's ashes, threw shadows to the ground.
>
> But then the wind stopped. The fire went to coals. The trees were silent. No comets marked the dark lovely sky, and the moment was gone. In the fast beat of a double heart, it died.

Vidal has disparaged the writing in his own book as "clumsy gray all-American prose," a style he outgrew in the later, more imaginative novels such as *Myra Breckinridge* and the highly praised historical fictions. He went so far as to revise the original text in 1965, changes the new edition incorporates. While the book is no prose masterpiece, it's a reasonably deft piece of post-

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war realism that later on in the book has a number of wonderfully executed satiric set-pieces, precocious for a novelist of 21. In the passage above it isn't grayness that we see, but rather a youthful writer's indulgence of the pathetic fallacy as wind and fire mirror the boys' rise and fall from unity. Bob says afterward, "You know that was awful kid stuff we did," and Jim replies, "I suppose so...but I liked it." When Bob says it's not natural, Jim reluctantly agrees, but "again excited, they embraced and fell back onto the blanket." The powerful fear of intimacy between men is ineluctably present, but it doesn't win out over the boys' youthful hearts.

The scene by the river becomes a memory that Jim will carry with him through the rest of the book. This innocent, unnamed affection becomes the rule against which he measures all other versions of love, and all come up lacking. After heading to sea in search of Bob, he ends up on a double date in Seattle with a sailor named Collins. They go home with the girls, but at the moment of truth Jim can't stand the sight of the woman's naked body, and flees from the apartment. "Let the queer go! I got enough for two," Collins calls after him. Jim's anxiety that he might be gay doesn't begin at the river where he lies with his teenage love, but here at the first point in the novel where his desire is actually named. It's the label, not the act, that produces crisis.

In this panic over naming, we can see a homology between Jim Willard's fears and those of today's social conservatives. In the military context, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell," the now-infamous compromise over gays in the armed services, tacitly allows private homosexual sex so long as it is never mentioned or discussed publicly. Similarly, in the marriage debate, having lost the battle over the basic right of people to engage in voluntary same-sex conduct, both in the court of public opinion and now, with this past summer's decision in *Lawrence v. Texas*, in the Supreme Court itself, the right wing is digging in its heels over the question of what recognition or name that love will be granted in the public square. On both the military and the marriage front, then, the issue is no longer about sex per se but rather the publicity it receives. In legal-theory terms, the battle is no longer over conduct but status. Fifty years earlier, *The City and the Pillar* seems to have intuited that when it comes to homosexuality in this country, this is where the real struggle lies, not only in the realm of national politics but in the psyche of the American male.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that the novel has often been described as being unapologetic about homosexuality. To the extent that it shows two young men having sex and not feeling terribly bad about the fact, this is accurate. But it would be a serious mistake to think it is an early literary banner for gay rights or a gay identity. On the contrary, the novel is shot through with an admiration for men who eschew that label and behave in a traditionally masculine fashion. In this sense, the book can be seen as a forerunner to modern gay culture's fetish relation to a certain parody of "real manhood" as embodied in a thousand commercial images of strapping muscles, military buzz cuts and tough-guy stares. Put rather crudely, Jim and Bob's riparian adventure would make a great hit in today's gay pornography: They're not gay, but they do it anyway.

One supposes that the tension between his family's early political ambitions for him and his own sexual preferences created in Vidal a particularly acute awareness of the line between conduct

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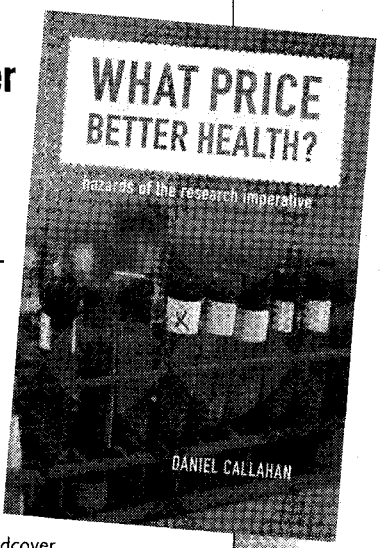

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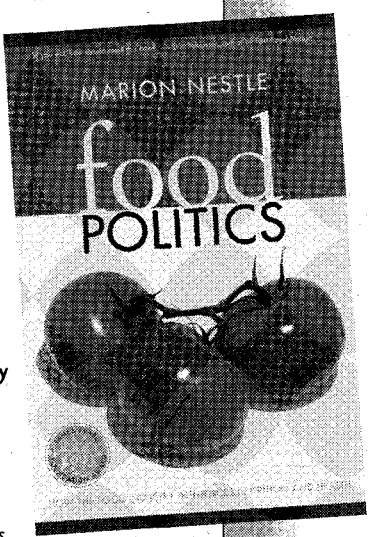

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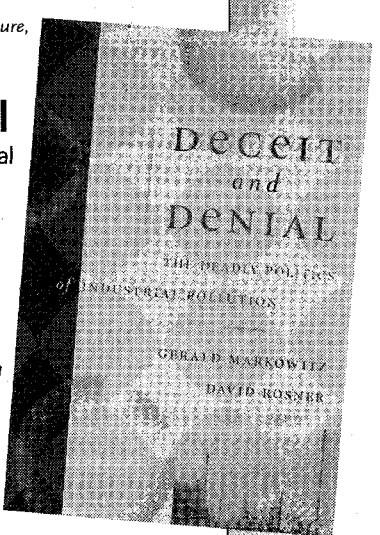

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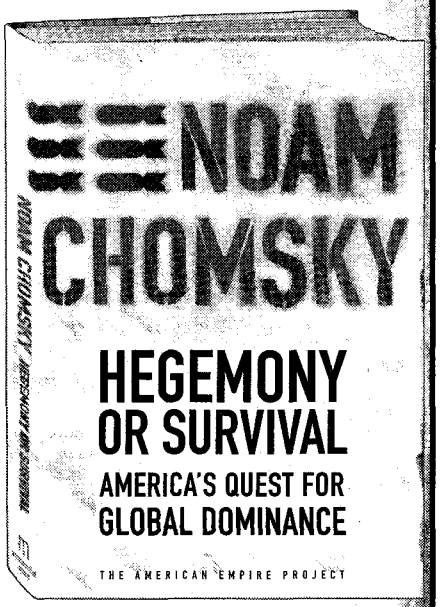

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and status. There was no question of feeling guilty about the former ("As far as I can tell, none of my family ever suffered from that sort of [sexual] guilt, a middle-class disorder from which power people seem exempt," he writes in his memoir). The status, on the other hand, could end your career, and Vidal knew it. Whatever its source, this negative capability on his part to celebrate the unlabeled act of sexual love between men while keeping his main character somehow aloof from the status such an act connotes is part of what makes the book still such a relevant text in understanding how and why men identify with or distance themselves from the public expression of sexual liberty. Relevant because no matter how complete the victories in gay rights become, each young man or woman is still confronted with the dilemma of whether to adopt the presumptive association between act and identity and describe themselves as gay. The resistance to this presumption has already shown itself in the form of queer activism, and will no doubt change as time goes on. Whatever the legal landscape, the tension over what place a named sexual orientation has or should have in self-understanding and self-description isn't going anywhere.

The "word Collins had shouted after him was hardly apt. It couldn't be. It was too monstrous. Yet because it had been said, he could never see Collins again." Following this moment of panic in Seattle, our hero leaves ship life behind and heads to Los Angeles. The next hundred pages of the novel take Jim to Hollywood, Mexico and New York and far into the gay underworld. These sections are among the strongest in the book. They combine a sort of documentary account of postwar gay life and its new, relative openness with Vidal's nascent genius for social satire. Jim becomes the kept boy of the closeted matinee idol Ronald Shaw, an endlessly vain, self-involved fellow. In his dressing room on the studio lot, "Shaw patted a muscular thigh with obvious affection. 'That's what they want out there in the dark and I got it.'" Vidal's take on America as a carnival of sex, power lust and hypocrisy, "a sanctimonious society of hustlers," as he recently called it on *American Masters*, is coming into early view, though interestingly here it is tinged with an empathy for those who act in the carnival, something his public comments don't always suggest. Narcissistic and unpleasant as he may be, Ronald Shaw is a sad figure, someone we are meant to pity.

Though he travels through these worlds, Jim Willard is not quite of them. Shaw is drawn to him precisely because he's not like the others. He's not effeminate but "natural and...unscheming." In other words, he looks and acts like a straight guy. Paul Sullivan, the handsome but tortured literary writer who has temporarily sold his soul to Hollywood, is attracted to the same quality in Jim and lures him away from Shaw. At a party for Sullivan's new novel back in New York, Vidal, already a cynic about publishing, has Jim overhear the bitchy chatter of editors. "I suppose there will be war novels. The real horror of war is the novels which are written about it."

One marvels at the worldliness of a 21-year-old who could pen such a wicked, jaded line. Certainly Jim Willard couldn't have. Vidal invests his hero with an innocence and naïveté that he himself no longer possesses, though he is as young. Which brings me to what I think is going on in the jarring and to this day still radical final scene in the book.

After splitting with Sullivan and continuing his life as a tennis pro, Jim finally gets back in touch with Bob Ford, married now to his high school girlfriend. They meet once down in Virginia and Jim comes away with his illusions intact, imagining that with Bob still working at sea, somehow his wife can be kept to the side and he and Bob can carry on the love that began at the cabin by the river, a love unmarked and unsullied by the names Jim has been called and the places he has travelled in the intervening years. In the novel's final sequence, the two of them meet in New York and after a night of drinking end up back at Bob's hotel room. Jim carefully makes sure Bob gets drunk while he remains more sober.

At last he draws the conversation around to their time at the cabin; Bob dimly remembers that they fooled around. Encouraged, Jim asks if he has done it with anyone else. "Any other guy? Hell, no. Did you?" he asks.

"No," Jim replies, uttering what is perhaps the single saddest word in the book. Willing to cast aside everything his life has been to steal his way back into the affections of his married friend, the portrayal of Jim hovers here on the edge of a cliché: the pathetic or defeated homosexual. But the scene isn't over. When they finally crash out on Bob's bed, Jim reaches over and starts touching his friend as he has dreamed of doing again all these years. Bob swats him away in anger, calls him a queer and tells him to get out. The long-held illusion is shattered. At which time, Jim Willard wrestles Bob Ford to the bed and rapes him.

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There may be other scenes in film or literature of a gay man raping his straight best friend, but I've never seen, read or heard of them. The original edition, in fact, went a step further and had Jim strangle Bob. Critics, along with Vidal's good friend Tennessee Williams, thought the ending weak and out of keeping with the rest of the book. The suggestion was that Vidal had shown us very little if anything in Jim to suggest he is capable of such a dramatic act, and for this reason the scene's violence isn't earned. I disagree. While it may be true that a line here or there would have better prepared the reader for the final act, be it murder or rape, the book is first and foremost about someone living an illusion, placing their hopes in an impossible dream; when it is denied there is an explosion, a violent decomposition of the personality formed on that hope. For all his apparent ease, Jim Willard is a man under pressure, and at the end he breaks.

Like all rape, this one is more about power and humiliation than sex. *I have tarried so long with my desire for you, and now you dare to rebuff me? I'll show you who the weak one is.* After the act itself, "Jim crossed to the bed and looked down at the body he had loved with such single-mindedness for so many years. Was this all? He put his hand on Bob's sweaty shoulder. Bob shied away from him: fear? disgust? It made no difference now. Jim touched the pillow. It was wet. Tears? Good."

It is a brief but incredibly powerful scene both dramatically and symbolically. For all the book's other merits as a social document, I think it is this utterly unsentimental conclusion that grants it the status of a minor classic. All the pathos of Jim's hope that he could exempt himself from the "irrelevant world" and enjoy a nameless innocence comes to dark fruition in this moment, and while the novel may be light on emotion through many of the more descriptive scenes, here you'd need to be numb not to feel it. The writing has cost the writer something, and it shows. It took guts to write this scene. It took someone as headstrong and brave as Gore Vidal to do it. And the writer's bravery lies not just in risking the portrayal of one young man raping another, symbolically a more radical act than simple murder. It lies also in being strong enough to imagine oneself behaving with such violence against a dead friend.

In his memoir, musing on the years after Jimmie Trimble's death, Vidal writes, "In due course, I wrote a novel in which I described what might have happened had we met again years later. The conclusion was too harsh for many readers, but that is the

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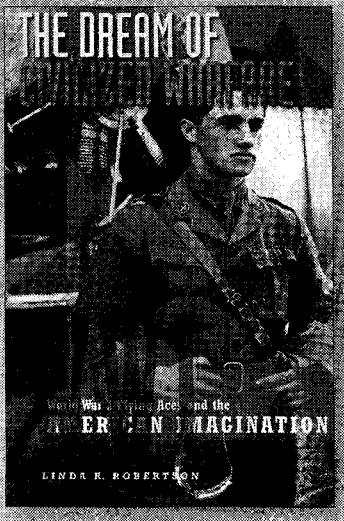

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way American society is and I was a realistic writer until, one day, I realized that there is no common reality beyond desire, the pursuit, and, in at least one case, the achievement of the whole."

Fair to say, then, that in *The City and the Pillar*'s final scene it is not just Jim Willard trying in his frustrated rage to humiliate Bob Ford but a young writer trying to murder and dominate a ghost. Of such doomed, utterly unsought tasks great writing is made. ■

A Soldier's Story

FRANCES FITZGERALD

WINNING MODERN WARS: Iraq, Terrorism, and the American Empire.
By Gen. Wesley K. Clark. PublicAffairs. 218 pp. $25.

In the annals of American politics *Winning Modern Wars* is an unusual book. Written—by Clark himself—between April and September of this year, it proceeds from an analysis of the military campaigns in Afghanistan and Iraq to a comprehensive critique of Bush's war on terror and on his national security policy generally. Possibly some other modern presidential candidate wrote a book such as this just before entering the race, but offhand I can't think of one. Most of Clark's views about the general direction of US foreign policy will sound familiar, for most are shared by the other major Democratic contenders. However, this book is nothing like the goo usually served up in campaign literature, for he is also a very good writer: logical, lucid and concise. Moreover, he has much of interest to say about military operations and the relationship—or lack of it—between specific campaigns and the overall US security strategy. He is well qualified for the task.

Many Army officers believe that the only job worth having, in peacetime as in war, is commanding troops, and that those who spend a substantial part of their career doing anything else can't be real men or good officers. Clark has commanded troops. From 1969 to 1970 he served as a company commander in Vietnam, where he won a Silver Star for gallantry after being wounded in a skirmish. Later he commanded a tank battalion, an armored brigade and the First Cavalry Division. He also ran the National Training Center preparing troops for the Gulf War. Still, Clark has had problems with such officers. He is too much the intellectual for them, and at every turn in his career he took the opportunities offered to widen his horizons. He ended up with an inconvenient independence of mind.

Born in Chicago but raised in Arkansas by his mother and stepfather, a retired banker, Clark went through the public school system not far from Clinton's birthplace in Hope. Offered scholarships to a number of prestigious colleges, he chose West Point—apparently because of a swim coach and mentor who had served in World War II. In 1966 he graduated first in his class and went to Oxford on a Rhodes scholarship. After his tour in Vietnam, he returned to West Point to teach economics and political philosophy. Later he studied at the Army Command and General Staff College—and again graduated first in his class. Chosen in 1975 to be a White House Fellow, he worked for a year in the Office of Management and Budget, learning the ways of Washington. His subsequent assignments took him to Germany and then to NATO headquarters in Brussels. Along the way he held several staff jobs analyzing military performance in past conflicts. In one of them he helped draft the Army's account of its actions in the Gulf War. In 1994 Clark became director for strategic plans and policy on the Joint Staff in Washington and spent much of his time in shuttle diplomacy in the Balkans and acting as senior military negotiator at the Bosnia peace talks in Dayton the next year. He ended his career as Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, having led NATO through its first war to the successful occupation of Kosovo. His determination to win that war and to stop Slobodan Milosevic's ethnic cleansing of the province made him enemies in the Pentagon. The Joint Chiefs did not consider the war a priority, and they resisted his urgent requests to make preparations for a ground attack to back up the bombing campaign. Clark was forced to retire three months early. His first book, *Waging Modern War*, is a memoir of the period and a revealing look at NATO and Pentagon politics.

Structurally, *Winning Modern Wars* parallels Clark's trajectory from being a retired four-star general and CNN's senior military analyst for the invasion this past spring to a Democratic contender for the presidency this fall. Yet there is method in his manner of proceeding from the specific to the general and from a stellar operation to its context and consequences.

Clark begins with a detailed critique of "Operation Iraqi Freedom," the campaign to take Baghdad. His account of the invasion is marvelously lucid, and the book is well worth reading just for that. For example, he explains why the Iraqi command made a critical error when, in a classical military move, it ordered the Republican Guard divisions deployed around Baghdad to head south and face the American attack. But he has an argument, and it is this: The invasion had been meticulously planned over the course of fourteen months, yet for a variety of reasons (some logistical, some diplomatic, some still obscure) the buildup in Kuwait was far from complete on March 20, when the troops were ordered into Iraq. American and British commanders moved in with only three division-size forces and two separate brigades. Later two more US Army brigades were committed to the fight, but the other units slated to join them did not deploy until afterward. Thus the brilliantly successful campaign to oust the Baathist regime was waged by an extremely small force. In Clark's view the victory demonstrated the effectiveness of the military transformation since the end of the cold war: that is, the integration of the services and the development of information technology and precision weapons. He believes the transformation permitted the United States to defeat Saddam's divisions more quickly and with far fewer American or Iraqi civilian casualties than would have been the case had George Bush Sr. decided to move on Baghdad in 1991.

On the other hand, the victory did not, he contends, vindicate Rumsfeld's view that the future of warfare lies entirely with small, agile ground forces and high-tech weaponry. To the contrary, he writes, the lessons taken from this campaign will be conservative. Yes, the forces assembled proved sufficient to defeat the badly equipped and badly led Iraqi divisions. But, as the unexpected resistance from Iraqi irregular forces showed, combat is one of the most unpredictable of human activities, and because lives are at stake, the whole idea of

Frances FitzGerald, a member of The Nation *editorial board, is the author, most recently, of* Way Out There in the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the End of the Cold War *(Touchstone).*

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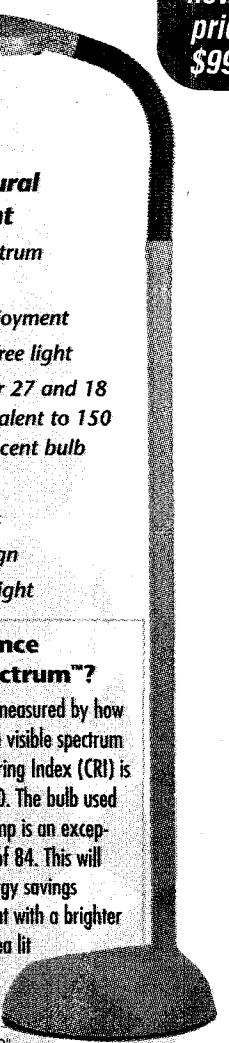

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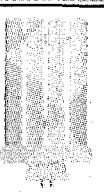

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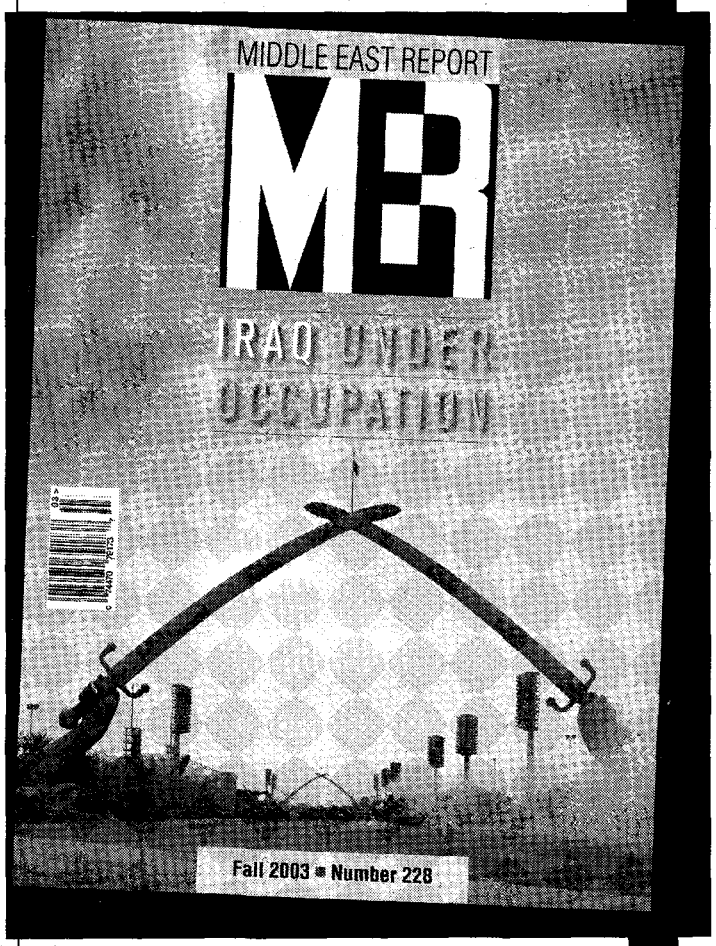

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military planning is effectiveness, not efficiency. By skimping on forces the American command took unnecessary risks in battle—and it was unable to cope with the chaos that immediately followed the collapse of the Baathist regime.

Clark goes on to provide some answers to what has become a major question in recent months: Why was the planning for the post-Saddam period in Iraq so inadequate? In the first place, he points, as some journalists have, to the bureaucratic struggles within the Administration and to the rosy scenarios that went unchallenged among the top Pentagon civilians who eventually took charge of the enterprise. But he also points to more profound tendencies within the US government and Washington as a whole. The Army, he writes, has long resisted investing or engaging in peace operations, even though every recent conflict, from Panama to Kosovo, has required such operations to attain the desired objectives. One reason for this failure, he suggests, is that the Army's mandate and historic task has been to fight high-intensity wars. Another is that the military-industrial complex makes its money off high-tech weaponry and not off such things as language training or the development of skills to deal with policing and legal systems. Furthermore, the Republican-controlled Congresses of the 1990s could be counted upon to vote against anything that smacked of "nation-building." In the mid-1990s the Clinton Administration tried to create an interagency capability for dealing with failed states, such as Haiti and Somalia, but the effort never got very far, and the Bush Administration brushed it aside. Thus before the invasion there was no structure or organization within the US government with the expertise to plan for the future of Iraq—much less one with the resources to implement such a plan. Then, too, Clark writes, by going to war without international support and by refusing to cede any power over the political process afterward, Bush forfeited the help he might have received from other governments and from international organizations that had expertise and resources to contribute. The Army and the Iraqi people are now paying the price for these failures.

"All else being equal," Clark writes in conclusion, "the region and the Iraqi people were all better off with Saddam gone." But of course all else is not equal.

In the next section Clark takes on Bush's conduct of what he calls "the real war" on terror. The Administration, he acknowledges, has had considerable success in eliminating Al Qaeda's commanders, disrupting its networks and going after its financing. On the other hand, it has made some serious mistakes, and its approach has been too narrow to constitute an effective counterterrorism strategy. In Afghanistan, he writes, the Administration adopted much the same approach as it did in Iraq, and with comparable results. Its campaign to take Kabul and oust the Taliban was brilliantly conceived and executed, but the aim should have been not just to unseat the regime but to deliver a crippling blow to Al Qaeda, and the opportunity was missed. At the battle of Tora Bora in December 2001 and in Operation Anaconda the next spring, US forces and their Afghan allies failed to fix and destroy the massed Al Qaeda and Taliban forces. In the wake of the initial conflict, the United States simply did not have enough troops on the ground, and the Afghan tribes allowed Osama bin Laden and his allies to slip away. The Administration then failed to commit the resources necessary to stabilize the country and

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refused to permit its NATO allies to help out, except in Kabul. As a result, Al Qaeda and Taliban remnants were able to use the territory on either side of the Pakistani border to hide, to recruit and to mount a guerrilla war. The Administration was, of course, disinclined toward nation-building, but beyond that its focus even then was on Iraq, on an agenda much older than 9/11, and on a war that would "enlarge the problem [of terrorism] rather than to focus on its essence."

In Clark's view, another of the Administration's mistakes in "the real war" was to rely on a "floating coalition" of the willing rather than to go to the UN and to NATO to develop multilateral approaches. With a "floating coalition" the US government has had to wrestle with a hundred bilateral relationships, and as difficult as this is at the top, it is even more difficult at the bottom, where most of the work gets done, because even in Europe countries have very disparate antiterrorism laws. Yet another mistake the Administration has made, as he sees it, is to focus on terrorists and their financing rather than look to the roots of recruitment in repressive policies, lack of development and the spread of fundamentalist *madrassas* in countries like Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia—all American allies. Further, he writes, the Administration has not gone about curbing the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction effectively: It has not increased funding for securing the "loose nukes" in Russia, and until just recently it had done nothing about North Korea. In addition, Clark complains that homeland security has not been well managed: The Ashcroft approach has raised critical questions about civil liberties, and the Office of Homeland Security has failed to address key issues. At the very least, he says, the Administration should by now have come up with an agreed list of the facilities in the public and private sectors that require protection and an agreement on what the standards of protection should be. Iraq, in his view, has distracted the Administration's attention from all these things—and must for some time to come. In his opinion, a withdrawal that leaves Iraq in chaos, allows the return of the Baathist regime or permits the emergence of a radical Islamist state would do great damage to American security. He believes the United States should help the Iraqis form a representative government with political and economic freedoms—though how Washington is going to do this, he does not explain.

In his final chapter, Clark attacks the Administration's conception of American power and substitutes his own. Last April, he tells us, there was talk in Washington of Iraq as the first stepping stone to a new American empire. As the US armed forces marched on Baghdad, the perception was that the US military had achieved such a degree of superiority over all its rivals that Bush might fulfill his vision of liberating Iraq and transforming the whole of the Middle East under a Pax Americana. But the truth was that the US Army, the only force available, was not suited to this quasi-imperial vision: It was built for warfighting; it lacked staying power abroad and it lacked nation-building skills. Further, the American public had little taste for empire, and the international community had turned against the war. As it is, Clark writes, the Army has become dangerously overstretched, and US foreign policy dangerously dependent upon it. Clark sees the aggressive unilateralism of the Bush Administration as having roots that go back to the reaction to the cultural revolutions of the 1960s

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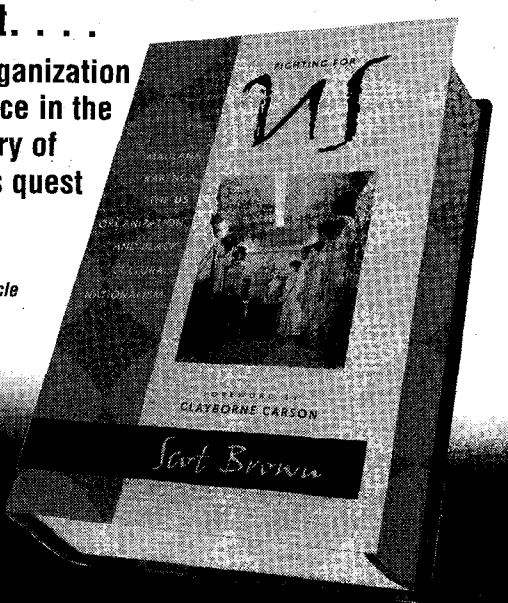

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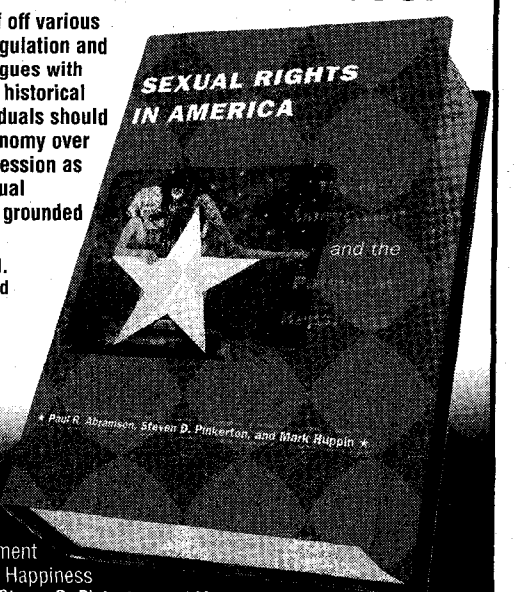

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and to the withdrawal from Vietnam and the other foreign policy reverses of the 1970s. After 9/11 Bush tapped into this frustration, reinforced, as it was, with real fear and determination.

Perhaps this should not have surprised us. "Transforming frustration at home into action abroad has emerged as a pattern in democracies under stress," Clark observes. "It...happened in ancient Rome, in the Netherlands and in Britain. And like most distractions, it provided false reassurance and was followed by damaging consequences." In Clark's view, American power resides to a large degree in the "virtual empire" the United States constructed after World War II: that is, among other things, its network of economic and security arrangements, the leverage it had in international institutions and treaty regimes, plus the shared values and reservoir of trust, or "soft power," that permitted past Presidents to lead by persuasion. Clark's forceful book warns that the Bush Administration is undermining this virtual empire and at the same time imperiling the "hard power" Bush counts upon, the power of America's economy and armed forces. ■

The Foreign Correspondent

NEAL ASCHERSON

GELLHORN: A Twentieth-Century Life. By Caroline Moorehead. Henry Holt. 463 pp. $27.50.

How we miss Martha Gellhorn, and how we need her right now! It's hard to believe that she isn't at this moment striding down dangerous streets in Falluja or Najaf or Baghdad, eyes narrowed, looking as great in her slacks as she looked in the Saks Fifth Avenue pants in which she covered the Spanish Civil War. Hard to believe that we won't read her on Iraq, as we read her on Spain, the last world war, Vietnam, Panama. She imagined editors asking: "Who is this tall, fierce, irritable, impatient, sunburned, driven woman?" She never imagined readers asking: "How could that tall, driven woman, who had more irritable life in her than ten ordinary humans plugged together, be dead?"

And yet, five years since she decided to end that life with a pill in her ninetieth year, Martha Gellhorn deserves better than sainthood. She was the best reporter of war to write in English for the past sixty years—war, that is, as something experienced by ordinary people and soldiers, rather than as "combat" and arrows on a map. But it would be unsafe to predict which line she would take on the general rightness or wrongness of a war or a policy. As a phenomenon, Gellhorn was utterly consistent. To take one typical example from Caroline Moorehead's biography, another American journalist in Vietnam found her "gorgeous, clear-eyed with the facts straight as rulers"; he loved her "shirty nonchalance." She was always like that in public. But she was not always consistent about her causes.

In truth, I am not sure how she would have stood on the Iraq war. A big factor would certainly have been detestation of George W. Bush and the global military arrogance of the Rumsfeld clique in the Pentagon, repeating all the crimes for which Gellhorn had belabored Nixon, Kissinger and Reagan. On the other hand, she switched off her sympathy when it came to the sufferings of Arabs. She was entirely committed to the cause of Israel (to the point of applauding the 1982 invasion of Lebanon), remained deaf to the Palestinian case and might well have decided that the most unscrupulous power politics were justified in order to rid the world of Saddam Hussein. It's a thought—a speculation—that will upset many of those who loved her, and who as reporters try to live up to her fighting spirit and hunger for justice. But Martha Gellhorn was not bankable, not somebody who could be signed up to a cause in advance. What counted with her was the people she met on the ground, in the field, and how she felt about them.

This is a masterpiece of biography. Caroline Moorehead, a professional in that literary trade, knew exactly how to organize, select and use the treasure of Martha Gellhorn's letters, preserved in their thousands at Boston University and in the archives of her friends. Born in 1908 in St. Louis, Gellhorn grew up in a letter-writing world and used letters, perhaps even more than personal contact, to maintain intense conversations with a small circle of friends, lovers and ex-lovers, and family members. Almost everything Moorehead has set down about Gellhorn's private life comes from this marvelous, revealing correspondence. So do most of the best lines about Gellhorn herself. "I revere courage," she wrote to her old teacher Hortense Flexner. "Perhaps I make it God, and endow it with every other quality, as stemming from it." Or, remembering her sight of Dachau in 1945, "I have never again felt that lovely, easy, lively hope in life which I knew before, not in life, not in our species, not in our future on earth."

Gellhorn's father was a doctor, a German immigrant, and her mother was a campaigner for women's suffrage. Both were half-Jewish, a fact that appears to have counted for nothing in the family, and Martha was brought up in an almost-Presbyterian atmosphere of busy, book-nourished but practical idealism. All her life, her mother, Edna, remained her daughter's "true north," as she put it, and it was indirectly through her that Martha found her way to Franklin Roosevelt's White House as a young "poverty investigator" for Harry Hopkins. Here began her political radicalism, her lifelong friendship with Eleanor Roosevelt and, in effect, her career as a writer. *The Trouble I've Seen* (1935), her stories about the Depression, was the first of her books to make an impact.

By then, Martha had already sown some spectacular wild oats in Europe. In Paris, she had begun an affair with the young Bertrand de Jouvenel (fresh from the bed of his stepmother Colette and himself already married), had worked as a model and a journalist, and had witnessed the great riot of February 6, 1934, when the French ultra-right attempted to take the National Assembly by storm. She had also visited Nazi Germany with the oddly naïve Bertrand and a band of pro-German French intellectuals, some of whom ended before Gaullist firing squads after the Liberation. So it was no 27-year-old innocent who walked into a Key West bar with her mother in December 1935 and found "a large dirty man in untidy somewhat soiled white shorts" reading his mail.

Gellhorn stayed with Ernest Hemingway for nearly nine years, four of them married to him. All the grim details are here ("a man must be a very great genius to make up for being such a loathsome human being," Martha wrote to her mother afterward), but Moorehead is shrewd enough to discount for hindsight after a failed marriage, and much of the fun and laughter they had together figures, too. She made

Neal Ascherson's most recent book is Stone Voices: The Search for Scotland *(Hill and Wang).*

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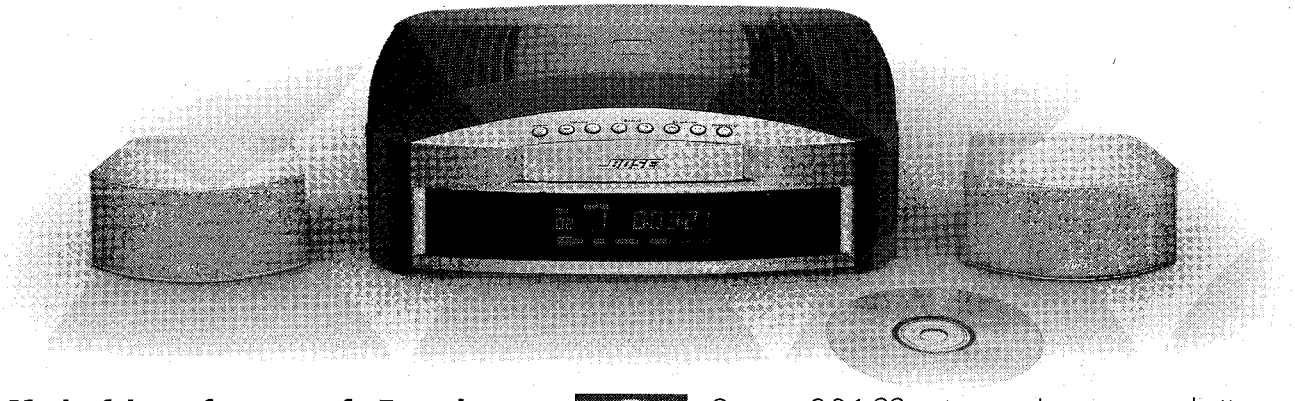

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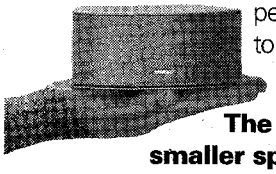

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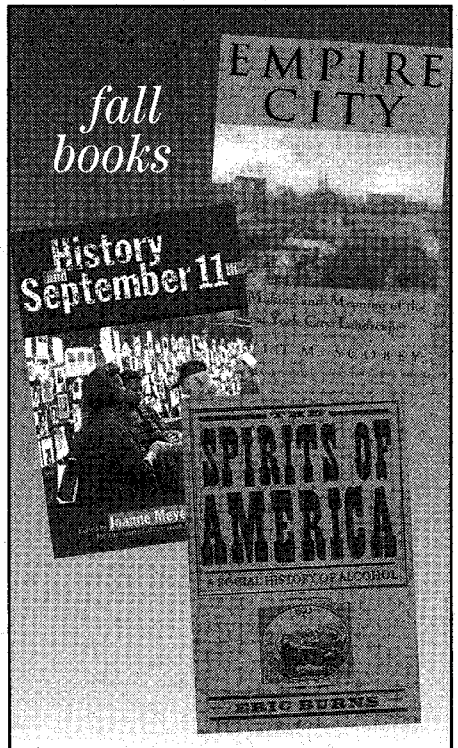

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the famous home in Cuba for him, watched over him as he wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and learned a lot about writing. He was a better novelist than she was, but Gellhorn's reporting—both from their time in Spain during the Civil War and during the world war that followed—is incomparably better than Hemingway's.

Besieged Madrid, like besieged Sarajevo in the 1990s and maybe London under the bombs in the 1940s, was a place that changed lives irrevocably. Gellhorn would always be grateful that she had "been young and there, at that time; I think we got something out of history that is more than anyone has a decent right to hope for." The commandment to fight and warn against fascism, and the memory of dead friends, possessed her. She learned much about the treachery and cowardice of politicians. She also learned that what mattered, for her, was to "be there." That lesson, and the increasing awfulness of life with Hemingway in Cuba, brought her back to Europe during the war. Forbidden as a woman to go into action as a war correspondent, she stowed away on a freighter and reached Omaha Beach on the second day of the invasion. Arrested and escorted back to England, she stowed away again on an aircraft to Italy and followed the battle lines from Salerno through Cassino to the Gothic line with a troop of Polish lancers. Another hitched ride on a plane took her to Paris, just after the Liberation, and from Paris she advanced with British and American divisions through Belgium into Germany itself.

She was writing articles all the time. The best of them, going back to her time in Spain, were finally published in 1959 in *The Face of War*. If these stories have a common element, it is brotherhood, the brave, generous, often merry companionship of young men and women who might not survive the day. In old age, she missed the "helpless laughter among chums who were glad to be alive because they knew about death." Groups like that—sometimes soldiers, often journalists—became Martha Gellhorn's real family. She did not want to be with them all the time, but it was in their midst that she found reassurance, laughter and some true friends (like Robert Capa, the photographer).

At times, this part of her life reads like a movie. During the Ardennes battles, soldiers of the 82nd Airborne Division caught this tall blonde striding about the snow with no accreditation or uniform and took her to their headquarters. Martha and Gen. James Gavin, youngest divisional commander in the US Army, fell for each other like a ton of bricks. The romance blazed in liberated Paris, then in the ruins of Berlin, until Marlene Dietrich, mad with jealousy, spread venomous rumors about Gellhorn and made off with General Gavin for her own night of passion. And so forth, and all true. But Martha Gellhorn, although she was fascinated by men and fell in love with a good many of them, was not made to satisfy male expectations.

Hemingway was not the first or the last man to love her for her independence, that "vitality, certainty, [and] total courage," but to resent her when she behaved independently. She was always off somewhere; she could not stand male self-pity; she grew bored even with her comfortable second marriage to the rich and at first undemanding Tom Matthews. Sexual satisfaction eluded her until she was middle-aged, and even then sex remained a domain where she felt uncharacteristically anxious and inadequate. Friendships with both men and women were her real emotional anchor. Moorehead describes well how in her last years, fighting heroically to stay fit and elegant, she gathered around her in London a troop of "chaps"—mostly much younger journalists and writers who gathered in her flat to drink whiskey and tell her their stories. They found her, in the words of an American acquaintance half a century before, a "barrel of fun and sharp as a tack." Her best nonfiction was republished at this time, and her quality as a writer, for so long obscured by routine association with Hemingway, was recognized at last. To her own ironic surprise, Martha Gellhorn ended up as a cult.

On her own after the war, she made homes in Mexico, perhaps her happiest for a few years, and later in Kenya. In postwar Italy, she decided to adopt a child and after whirling through fifty-two different orphanages, found a baby boy she wanted. "I sure waited a hell of a time to fall fatally in love," she said. But it was not an easy relationship. After a blissful babyhood in Mexico, Sandy was parked in bleak schools and homes while Gellhorn traveled restlessly up and down the world; he became an insecure, unhappy boy who brought out all her intolerance of weakness in others. "You have absolutely no style, your mind is as interesting as blotting paper," she once wrote to him. There was a long estrangement, only bridged in her old age.

She was an angry person, often magnificently and entertainingly angry, but sometimes shockingly unfair. What she saw in Dachau broke something in her, and she came to fear that the human race was a

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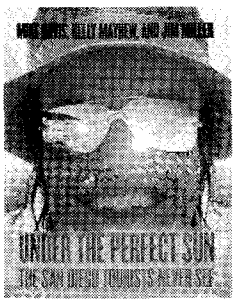

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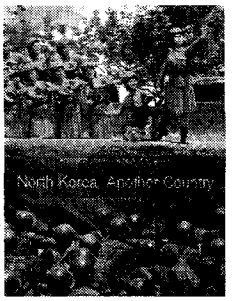

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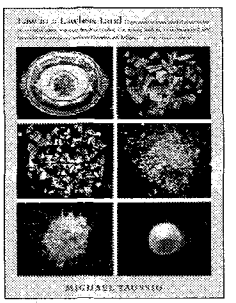

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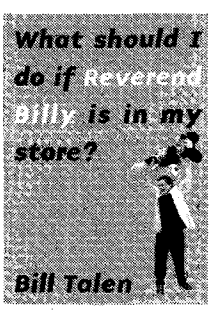

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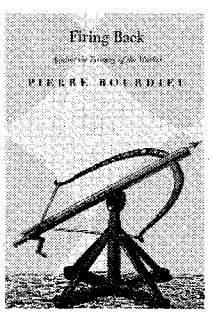

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scorpion intent on stinging itself to death. After the McCarthy persecutions, and especially after her return from Vietnam, she grew increasingly certain that American imperial power in the world was a force of evil and a source of mass misery: Reagan became one of her archvillains, soon joined by Mrs. Thatcher in Britain. There were times when she felt that all her battles and travels had achieved nothing: "I might as well have stayed in bed reading thrillers." But at other moments that old "shirty nonchalance" showed through. Two years before she died, at a journalists' roundtable in London, she let her well-hidden pride in her life gleam for an instant. "It seemed to me personally that it was my job to get things on the record, in the hopes that at some point or other, somebody couldn't absolutely lie about it." ■

Phantom of the White House

J. HOBERMAN

NIXON'S SHADOW: The History of an Image. By David Greenberg. Norton. 460 pp. $26.95.

"We now live in a culture that's hyperaware of the construction and manipulation of images in politics," David Greenberg writes in *Nixon's Shadow*. "The notion that our politicians regularly mislead us with manufactured and manipulated images is an underlying premise of much political commentary today." Led or misled, infuriated or entertained, we are all connoisseurs of image construction—just as we are experts at watching television.

Greenberg is not the first to recognize that America's post–World War II—which is to say, post-TV—political culture has become increasingly and even self-consciously preoccupied with stagecraft and authenticity. Each in his way, Norman Mailer, Marshall McLuhan and Daniel Boorstin responded to the 1960 contest between the uncannily glamorous John Kennedy and his unlovely rival Richard Nixon with a critique of our new media-driven democracy and the impact of political image-making.

For Greenberg, however, it was Nixon who would be the first American President pre-eminently concerned with the construction of his image. One might argue that Kennedy got there first, but unlike JFK, Nixon was a self-made man without the benefit of an extremely wealthy and well-connected stage-father. Nixon, Greenberg points out in his illuminating book, managed his first campaign even more than his campaign manager did—and, although abetted by aides typically recruited from advertising and public relations firms, he would continue to do so throughout his career. Yet Nixon's image-making, unlike Kennedy or Reagan's, regularly backfired. That is part of his fascination.

"Let's face it, a lot of people think Nixon is dull," erstwhile Nixon media consultant and reigning Fox News impresario Roger Ailes asserted—at least according to Joe McGinniss's highly influential New Journalism report, *The Selling of the President 1968*. "They look at him as the kind of kid who always carried a bookbag. Who was forty-two years old the day he was born. They figure other kids got footballs for Christmas, Nixon got a briefcase and he loved it. He'd always have his homework done and he'd never let you copy."

Ailes was among those commissioned with fashioning a New Nixon. "Put him on television, you've got a problem right away," McGinniss has him explaining to his staff. Nixon is "a funny-looking guy. He looks like somebody hung him in a closet overnight and he jumps out in the morning with his suit all bunched up and starts running around saying, 'I want to be President.'" And then he was.

The President's "symbolic power," in Greenberg's formulation, "exerts material force." Accordingly, his thoughtful, wittily titled history provides a more or less chronological account of the ways in which the outer-directed introvert Richard Nixon successfully lodged himself in the national consciousness.

Greenberg shows that Nixon was once upon a time positively attractive. "This man is saleable merchandise!" a California political honcho exclaimed upon hearing the young World War II vet, newly returned from the South Pacific, campaign for the Congressional seat held by New Dealer Jerry Voorhis. The case for Nixon's political genius can be made as early as 1946. Running as the embodiment of a new generation, perceived as engagingly ordinary, he was not simply a redbaiter but an avatar of the conservative, antigovernment populism later espoused by Barry Goldwater and Ronald Reagan. "Long before the right-wing ascendancy of the 1980s," Greenberg writes, "Nixon used populist imagery to extend conservatism's appeal beyond its upper-class base and to reach success by reviving, in his person and persona, the dream of the self-made man."

Nixon's pro-business, anticommunist conservatism was founded on hostility to liberal elites. (When he invoked "the forgotten man" in 1968, Greenberg notes, Nixon was not cribbing from George Wallace but from his own 1946 speeches; later, he would mine a still-rich political lode when he, and alter ego Spiro Agnew, lambasted the media as another biased liberal elite.) Nixon understood the Hiss case in populist terms; his Democratic opponent in the 1950 Senate race, Los Angeles Congresswoman and former actress Helen Gahagan Douglas, wasn't just a liberal pinko ("pink right down to her underwear") but a representative of Eastern interests, as well as a cryptofeminist career woman. Thus, candidate Nixon successfully universalized the personal sense of grievance he had nurtured since childhood. It is no surprise that such disparate masters of resentment as Ailes, Pat Buchanan, Kevin Phillips, Bob Dole and Donald Rumsfeld would be old Nixon men.

Entering the Senate in 1951, Nixon was the Republican Party's brightest star and hottest speaker. Dwight Eisenhower correctly saw in this dynamic, young and highly political politician the perfect complement to his own statesmanlike persona. The televised "Checkers Speech," Greenberg argues, not only saved Nixon's career but clinched his populist image. Appearing before more people than any politician in history, Nixon worked the living room like a sitcom paterfamilias. He showcased his wife (another first), discussed the family pet and became a national hero—or was it a star? "Your honesty and sincerity are unquestionable," the cartoon mogul Bill Hanna wrote Nixon. "Count my Democratic vote for 'Ike and Dick.'"

Nixon not only ran against the elites; by Greenberg's lights, he also constructed and defined a particular elite. It was the widespread liberal antipathy for Nixon's performance that effectively confirmed their marginal minority status. Indeed, Green-

J. Hoberman is senior film critic for The Village Voice *and the author, most recently, of* The Dream Life: Movies, Media, and the Mythology of the Sixties *(New Press).*

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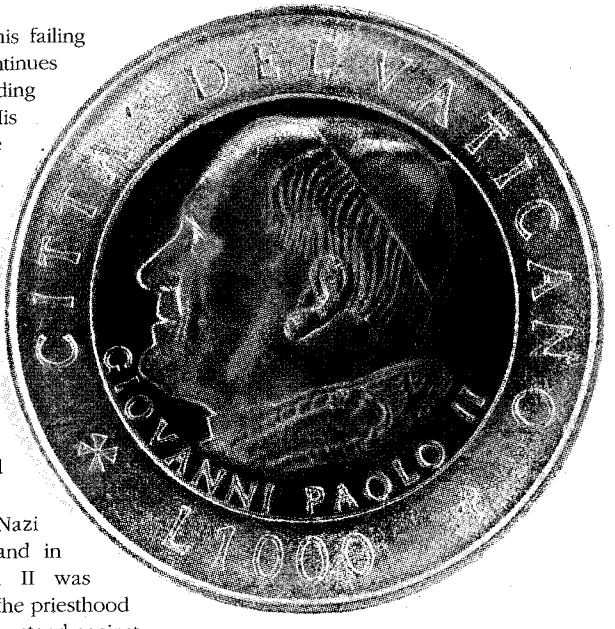

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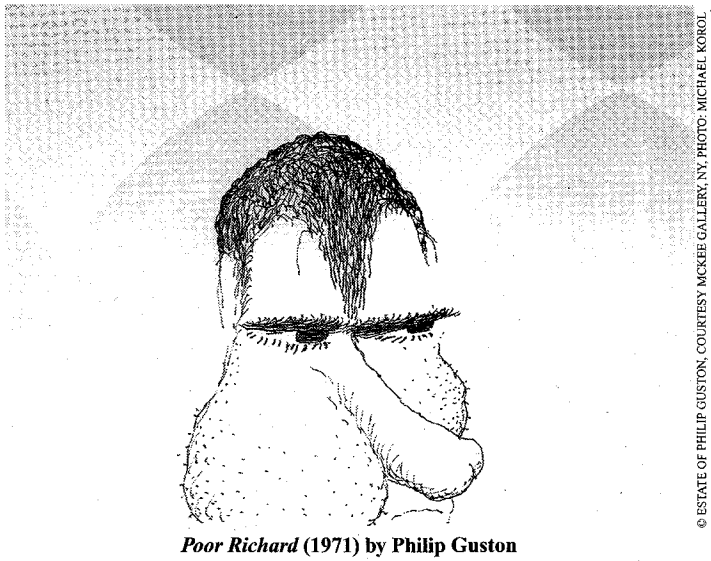
berg makes the same claim for the old phenomenon of Nixon-hating that is currently being made about Bush-hating—evidence that liberals have lost all touch with the great American public. Where ordinary people saw a plain-talking, two-fisted American Joe (someone like Frank Lovejoy in *I Was a Communist for the FBI*), liberals saw the very personification of televisual duplicity, clever hucksterism and crass manipulation. Nixon's "hard-hitting and cagey rhetorial style combined with his lack of grace to create a man who seemed false and dishonest to his core." A 1954 Herblock cartoon shows a Republican welcoming committee excitedly greeting an unshaven Nixon as he crawls out of the sewer: Tricky Dick.

Although Nixon was certainly among the inspirations for the hillbilly demagogue in Elia Kazan's 1957 *A Face in the Crowd*, the quintessential liberal warning against incipient media fascism, he only became an absolute evil once he came to power. It is Greenberg's thesis that just as 1950s liberals invented Tricky Dick, so the New Left created the being that I.F. Stone characterized as a "moral monster." Monster Nixon was a co-production. Every President colludes with the American people to create his own cult of personality. (Or, as Mailer observed on the occasion of Nixon's 1972 bid for re-election, the presidency is "a primitive office and inspires the tribes of America to pick up the modes and manners of their chief.") On the one hand, Nixon cast himself as a Legal Vigilante, the inspiration for Dirty Harry and all the beleaguered TV cops of the early 1970s; on the other hand, the United States of Nixon was a realm of mutual conspiracy. The President's paranoia led him to increase surveillance on black militants, student radicals and other opponents of the Vietnam War; that surveillance in turn justified and fueled popular paranoia. These symbiotic siege mentalities are epitomized in the once-notorious "Siege of San Jose" that erupted around Nixon during a 1970 campaign swing.

Was the President actually endangered by a youthful mob—the "most serious [such] attack on a national leader in American history," per William Safire? Or were the antiwar demonstrators deliberately provoked, either by Nixon or others, to just make it seem so? The answer depends on one's own personal Nixon.

Nixon's Shadow is structured around eight more or less successive Nixons—the young conservative populist, the vice presidential liberal *bête noire*, the conspirator in chief, the shameless news manager, the hapless victim, the madman, the elder statesman and the last liberal. None of these is Nixon's Nixon, author of *Six Crises* or the ranting voice on the White House tapes.



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***Poor Richard* (1971) by Philip Guston**

Greenberg is the biographer of *our* Nixon.

Even before Watergate confirmed the New Left vision of Nixon as aspiring tyrant, the President inspired all manner of literary visions. Gore Vidal parodied Nixon in his 1960 play *The Best Man*. Beginning in the late '60s, an impressive roster of American writers, including Robert Coover, Don DeLillo, Philip K. Dick, Joseph Heller, Thomas Pynchon, Ishmael Reed, Philip Roth and Garry Wills, took on Nixon as a character. Documentary filmmaker Emile de Antonio made a savage agitprop from Nixon news clips. Philip Guston created a devastating series of caricatures (recently collected in a short book, *Philip Guston's Poor Richard*). And, for a quarter-century, Nixon's paranoid self-pity, sonorous gloom, unctuous rage, cheesy neuroses, failed regular guy–ness, morbid sensitivity, hunger for approval, unprincipled opportunism and iron-butt single-mindedness provided juicy fodder for ham actors from Jason Robards to Anthony Hopkins.

Given his evident pathology and penchant for inadvertent self-disclosure (including, of course, the Watergate tapes), our Nixon was made for psychohistory. It was he, after all, whose Vietnam policy was based on persuading the Soviets and Chinese that he was—in his own words—a madman. Despite enjoying better press in his first year than any twentieth-century President since Teddy Roosevelt, Nixon successfully parlayed his distrust of the new media into the vendetta that would eventually bring him down. I was bumming around Eastern Europe in August 1974 and, desperate for news, went to the Budapest Hilton in search of an *International Herald Tribune*. "Is great victory for your media," a loitering KGB type remarked with juicy sarcasm, as I exultantly read of Nixon's resignation. Those who live by the gun die by the gun, and sometimes live again.

Incredibly, Nixon continued to work on his image even after his downfall. Greenberg gives a good account of Nixon's Reagan-era rehabilitation, the "Sage of Saddle River," per *Newsweek*'s 1986 cover story. With the following year's avant-garde triumph *Nixon in China*, the former President might be said to have achieved pop celebritude. Nixon, Greenberg notes, lived long enough to become a human pseudoevent. While revisionist Nixonologists with a postmodern sense of irony have made a case for Tricky Dick as the last of the big-spending liberal Presidents, much of America remembers him as the funny-looking square who posed for that wacky picture with a caped, bejeweled and obviously zonked Elvis.

That's our Nixon. Pundits have searched for literary antecedents to this creature (Uriah Heep, Tartuffe, Richard III). But Nixon is Nixon—suspicious and combative, tough yet clueless, socially awkward and fiercely driven, secretive and grandiose, the most complicated personality to ever rule the Free World. Bill Clinton, Greenberg points out, unintentionally echoed Roth's Trick E. Dixon in his unctuous Nixon eulogy: "It's our whole lives that you should be judging here tonight." There should at least be a footnote acknowledging the persistent attempt throughout the Clinton Administration by right-wing commentators, from Safire to *New York Post* editorial cartoonists, to portray the President and his wife as Nixons redux. Greenberg, however, is far too sober a commentator to speculate on the notion of Nixon as floating signifier.

Nixon's Shadow appears in tandem with David Lubin's *Shooting Kennedy: JFK and the Culture of Images* (California). Where Professor Lubin's free-associational tome is confidently glib, glam and strenuously hip, Professor Greenberg's is correspondingly

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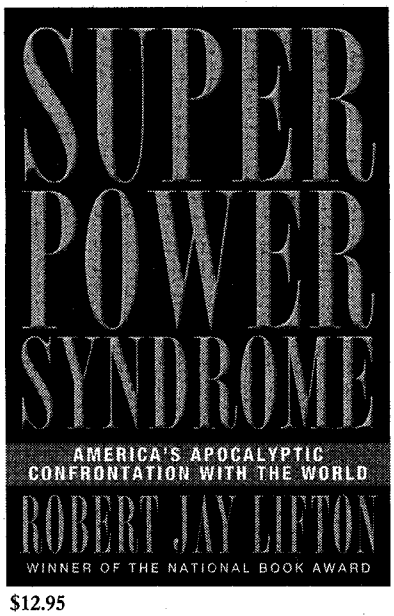

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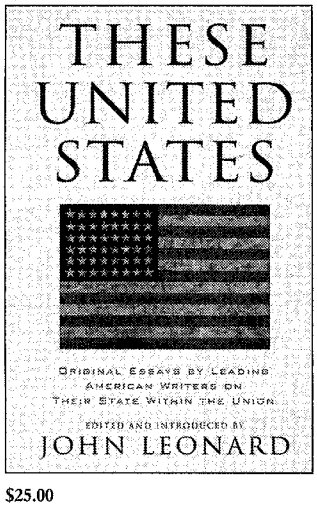

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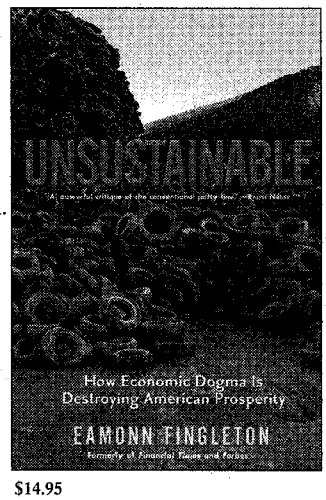

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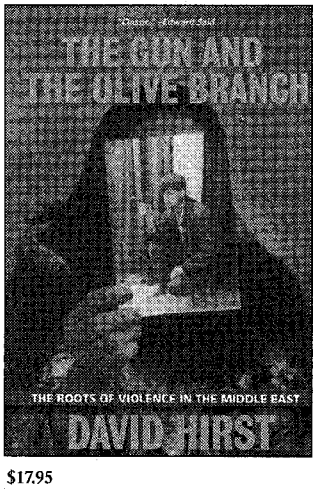

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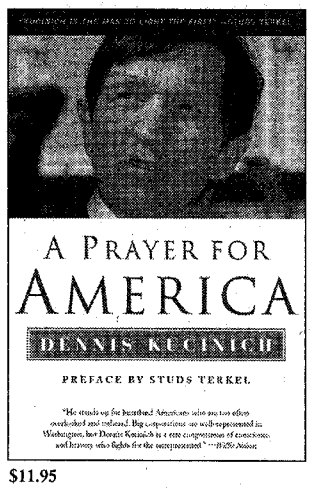

Prayer for America
By DENNIS KUCINICH
Preface by STUDS TERKEL

"[Kucinich] is one of the most interesting and unusual members of the Democratic presidential field for 2004. His strong, even radical positions on workers' rights, the environment, health care, foreign policy and defense give him a good claim to represent 'the Democratic wing of the Democratic Party.'" –***Publishers Weekly***

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dogged, dour and scrupulously historical. *Nixon's Shadow* might have benefited from a few of *Shooting Kennedy*'s madcap connections or even a few obvious ones. Nixon's pre-Cambodia obsession with the movie *Patton* gets but a single passing mention—and is there really nothing to be learned from Nixon's amply publicized, compensatory love of pro football? The NFL will forever be in debt to his passion.

Nixon's remarks on the 1970 John Wayne western *Chisum* are, however baffling, the first time an American President ever used a movie as the basis for a public pronouncement. In his epilogue, Greenberg calls pop culture a "better barometer and more powerful shaper of public opinion than newspaper commentary." He says it but he doesn't really believe it—and that's Nixon too. ■

Mystic Poet

TERRY EAGLETON

W.B. YEATS: A Life. Volume 2: The Arch-Poet. By R.F. Foster. Oxford. 798 pp. $45.

Most biographies of literary figures are a wonderful substitute for actually having to read the work. Instead of wrestling with *Leaves of Grass*, you can speculate about how many bastard children Whitman fathered. Plodding your way through Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* is for some a less enthralling pursuit than looking into the question of whether its author was a gay Roman Catholic. In the eighteenth century, Dr. Johnson published his magisterial *Lives of the Poets*; nowadays, it would have to be *Sex Lives of the Poets*.

Things are different, however, with William Butler Yeats. Because Yeats was a public poet, in a way that is impossible now and was difficult even then, there can be no clear division between the life and the work. This was not true of his English contemporaries. Somewhere between Shelley and Tennyson, poetry in England ceased to be a public affair. As we moved toward the modern age, art, like religion and sexuality, shifted from the public domain to the private one. All three became more like personal hobbies than affairs of state. Penning a lyric, going to church or wreathing your partner in chains and padlocks were now, like collecting beer mats or butterflies, nobody's business but your own.

Yeats's Ireland, however, had a venerable tradition of the poet as public figure, all the way from the early medieval bards to the nineteenth-century nationalist literati. For both good and ill, the distinctions between art, politics, religion and culture were less marked on the colonial island than in the metropolitan nation. Yeats spotted with his customary canniness that the post of public bard was still vacant around the turn of the twentieth century. The Irish revolution of independence was stirring, and the movement needed what Gramsci would have called its "organic" intellectuals. The middle-class Anglo-Irish Protestant poet from the west of Ireland applied for the position, so to speak, and was granted it to general acclaim. (In this, he was rather more successful than in his application for a post of professor of English at Trinity College, Dublin, which was turned down on the grounds that he misspelled the word "professor.") Soon Yeats would be not just poet and mystic but sage, theater director, cultural commissar, public man of letters and clandestine member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood. If the Celticizing, poetic part of him was away with the fairies (an Irish expression for madness), the hardheaded Protestant part took naturally to chairing committees and organizing demonstrations.

The Gaelic Catholic nationalist movement, to be sure, produced a robust intelligentsia of its own, from Daniel O'Connell to James Connolly. But the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy to which Yeats belonged had an honorable tradition of supplying that movement with some of its most distinguished leaders, all the way from Wolfe Tone to Charles Stewart Parnell. Governing classes enjoy more leisure, resources and education than their underlings, and will always produce deviant sons and daughters who hop over the class barriers to put their intellectual talents at the service of the common people. Yeats himself was hopelessly in love with one of those dissident daughters, Maud Gonne, and close to another, Countess Constance Markiewicz.

If this class treachery was generous-hearted, it was also deeply self-interested. Whenever one hears a passionate appeal for unity, of the kind Yeats and his colleagues were accustomed to promulgating, one can usually be sure that somebody's privileges are being quietly protected. By the turn of the twentieth century, with its landed estates confiscated by the British government and its political power undermined by the nationalists, the Anglo-Irish Ascendancy was more or less washed up as a ruling class. Soon, its big houses would be burned to the ground in the war of independence of 1919–21, an act that Yeats himself thought should be made a capital offense.

Seeking to spearhead the anticolonial movement was in one sense compensation for this loss of power. If this proved too belated and ambitious a project, then the Anglo-Irish could seize cultural rather than political hegemony. Hence the so-called Irish Literary Revival, staffed mostly by Anglo-Irish Protestant artists. Nationalism is a peculiarly poetic kind of politics, full of symbol, vision, myth and rhetoric; and who better to provide the emergent Gaelic nation with the mythologies it needed than renegade poets like Yeats?

These are not the kind of reflections one is likely to stumble upon in Roy Foster's magnificent biography of the poet, which this second volume brings to completion. For one thing, Foster is not terribly at home with ideas and abstractions. If Yeats had too many of them, his biographer has too few. He is shrewd, pragmatic, civilized and ironic, averse to big pictures and grand theories. This is one reason he is a favored son of the Anglo-Saxon establishment, which likes to think small. Another reason is that, as a commentator on Irish affairs, he tells the British by and large just what they want to hear about the place.

In any case, Foster is himself an offspring of Protestant Anglo-Ireland, and does not intend to be too rude about his eminent predecessors. It is not at all that he is out to whitewash Yeats; he pulls no punches over the poet's flirtations with Irish fascism (another word the great man couldn't spell), his fascination with violence, his sympathies for Mussolini's Italy or his unpleasant eugenic obsessions with stopping the poor from breeding. As with many a Modernist writer, Yeats's politics were as appalling as his writing was superb, though Foster is not the kind of thinker to whom it would occur to investigate the relationship between these facts. But he is also well aware that Yeats remains a political hot potato in Ireland today,

Terry Eagleton is professor of cultural theory and John Rylands Fellow at the University of Manchester, Britain. His most recent book, After Theory, *will be published early next year by Basic.*

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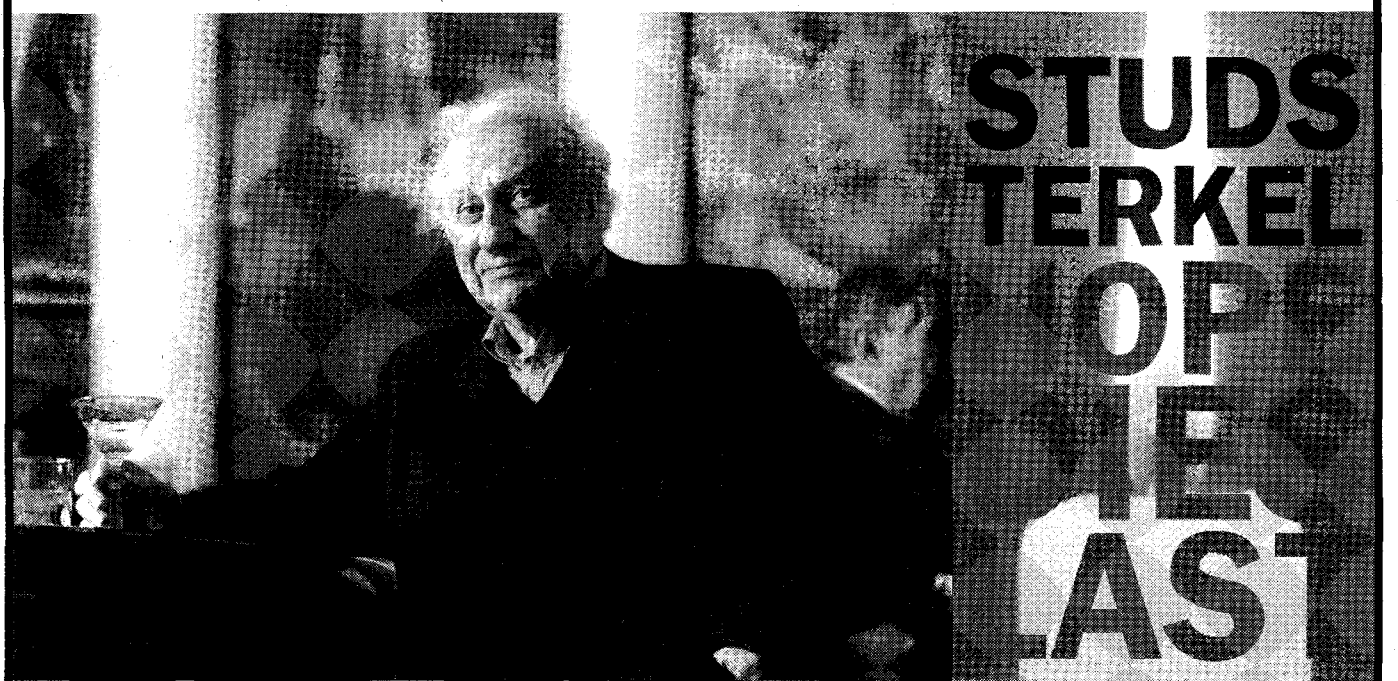

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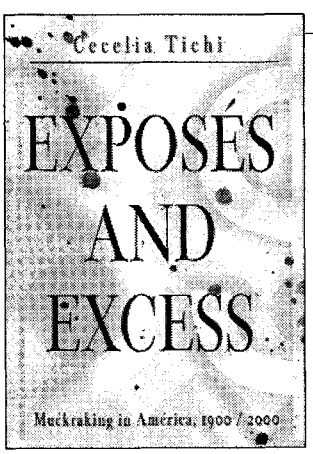

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censured by some Gaelic nationalists and wielded as a cultural totem by some of their opponents. Foster naturally wishes to tell the truth as he sees it, but he does not want to provide Yeats's critics with too much ammunition in the process.

In fact, Foster has scrupulously concealed beneath the suavities of his coruscating prose style an enormous chip on his shoulder. Like the members of many an ousted governing caste, from Malaysia to Zimbabwe, he harbors a smoldering resentment of the native anticolonial movement. Republicanism in his view is less a logical extension of Enlightenment democracy than a bigoted ethnic conspiracy to sideline posh Prods like himself. When an argument touches on this sore point, as Irish arguments often do, he finds it hard to keep his scholarly cool.

There is, for example, a notable difference in tone between his dispassionate treatment of Yeats's autocratic ideas and ridiculous posturings, and the sneery sardonicism that lurks just beneath the surface when he describes a Gaelic congress or festival. If Gerry Adams had written for himself the kind of breathtakingly arrogant epitaph that Yeats did, one suspects that Foster's response to it would not be quite so kid-gloved. He writes occasionally of "extreme" politics, meaning those who threaten his own interests. Yeats's own far-right views are not granted such an epithet.

Like the later Yeats's, then, Foster's distaste for Gaelic Catholic nationalism is both understandable and self-centered. Like Yeats, at least in one of his many personas, Foster springs from a distinguished lineage of Anglo-Irish liberals, whose secular bent and coolheaded rationalism put them at odds with the pious rednecker of the Catholic nationalists. (In another of his personas, however, Yeats's own redneckery was hard even for the Irish Catholic Truth Society to outdo.) The liberal Yeats is the man who spoke up courageously in the Irish Senate for divorce and freedom of thought, just as Foster today insists on thinking outside stereotypes of Irishness.

For reasons both admirable and discreditable, Foster would probably not feel at home in a London-Irish pub, let alone a Boston-Irish one. Irish country houses and London literary dinner parties are where he can relax among his own. The politics of Irish republicanism and antirepublicanism are much more a question of social class than is generally recognized. Foster has a Blairite affection for business schools, but would not recognize an anti-poverty campaign if one jumped into his lap. There is nothing in his writing to suggest that wretchedness and exploitation are anything but purely notional realities for him, a lamentable drawback for a historian. When it comes to the turbulent course of Irish history, he has certainly played his part in soft-pedaling them.

The Anglo-Irish, in fact, have been in their day both the mythologizers and demythologizers of the Irish nation. If they are dreamers and eccentrics, they are also caustic, plain-minded and allergic to orthodoxies. Sometimes, Anglo-Irish thinkers like Foster find themselves having to demythologize the myths of precursors like Yeats, as political fortunes change. In Yeats's day, nationalism seemed to signify a lease on life for this dying Ascendancy breed, and national narratives were accordingly churned out. Nowadays, such mythologizing simply gives comfort to Sinn Fein and the IRA—as, supposedly, do activities like commemorating the dead of the Great Famine, which Foster is on record as deriding. A spot of judicious demythologizing is thus called for, generally known as revisionism. Revisionists like Foster accordingly swap the unity

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of Ireland for the unity of Europe, Gaelic heroes for Anglo-Irish liberal ones and myths of primitivism for myths of modernization.

Yeats was a mythologizer and Foster is a demythologizer, but otherwise the encounter between them in this book proves remarkably productive. Yeats, who is 50 when the volume opens, becomes an enlightened Irish senator who supervises the design of the coinage that was used in Ireland until recently. He has a rather less enlightened involvement with the Irish Blueshirts (the fascist movement), speaks up for a cultivated despotism, turns out some of the finest poetry of the twentieth century and receives the Nobel Prize in Stockholm.

At the beginning of the book, he has married "George" Hyde Lees and is receiving supernatural messages through her trance-like writing. These stem from a group known as the Instructors, who inform the poet that the child with whom his wife is pregnant will be the Avatar whom the world needs for its salvation. (The son in question is still alive, but so far has shown no signs of any plan to assassinate Bush.) Few great writers have been so well and truly off the wall as Yeats, though Foster rather stiffly refuses to concede that he could be extraordinarily silly. By the end of the volume, the poet is worried about his sexual potency: A visit to a brothel, so he confides, was "like putting an oyster into a slot machine." He undergoes an operation to restore his virility, and dies greatly perturbed by the "filthy modern tide" and the degeneracy of the modern age.

W.B. Yeats: A Life is a formidable scholarly achievement. The research that informs it is staggering; its critical dissections are delicate and acute; and its supple, lucid prose is splendidly stylish. There are some marvelous cameos, like his one of Lady Ottoline Morrell: "Tall, soulful, still eccentrically beautiful at forty-five, she decorated both herself and her house in a high style, where gypsy-chic met mock-medieval splendour." Grippingly readable and intellectually rich, the book is without doubt one of the mightiest biographies of our age.

It therefore seems almost unspeakably churlish to inquire, after its author's seventeen years of devoted labor, whether it is really necessary. Do we really need an account of anyone in this kind of detail? Even Jesus Christ was granted nothing like this word length. No doubt some scholar will find it useful to learn that when Yeats moved house, "a phone was duly installed within ten days. Pictures were hung, the garden began to exert a spell, and he resumed playing croquet." For the less erudite among us, this is just a little more information than we needed, as Uma Thurman remarks to John Travolta in *Pulp Fiction* when he reports on his visit to the bathroom.

If Foster's project is vastly ambitious, it is in another sense too modest for its own good. Like a well-groomed BBC reporter, Foster confines himself for the most part to documenting his author's daily life with a minimum of critical commentary. Like many a biographer, he fails, or deliberately refuses, to step back from the trees to survey the woods. This self-denial is a major loss. Because of it, one's judgment on the whole heroic enterprise must inevitably be ambiguous: *C'est magnifique, mais ce n'est pas nécessaire.* This, however, will not be the general judgment of the critics, who will lavish praise on the book not only because it richly deserves it but because its author is incapable of entertaining an opinion that falls outside their own cozy liberal consensus. ■

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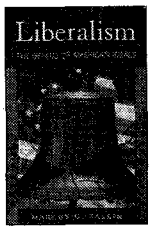

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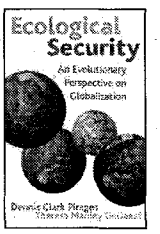

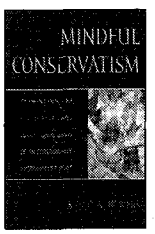

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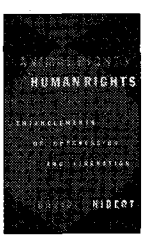

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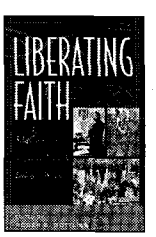

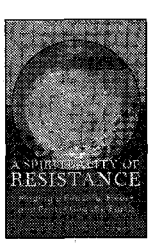

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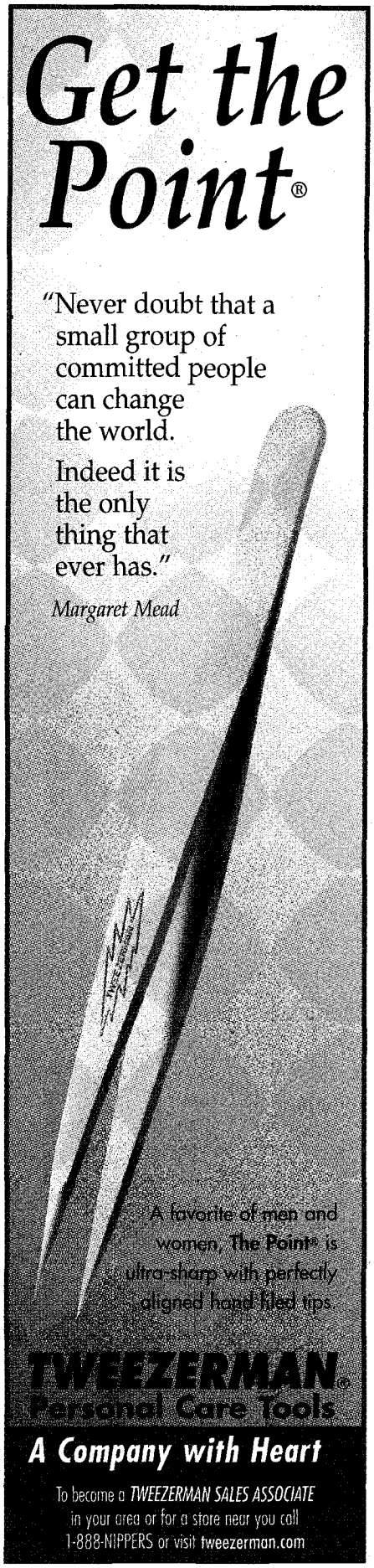
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Art Therapy

ARTHUR C. DANTO

GOYA. By Robert Hughes. Knopf. 429 pp. $40.

While filming in Western Australia in May 1999, the critic Robert Hughes survived—barely—a head-on collision with another car. The details of the accident are obscure, but Hughes credits the disaster with having unblocked the book he had hoped to write on Francisco Goya, an artist in whom he had a long interest. As a high-school student in Sydney, he had even purchased a "poor second state" of one of Goya's etchings—*El sueño de la razón produce monstruos* ("The sleep of reason produces monsters")—from the dark series *Los Caprichos*. The print shows the artist asleep over his drawing table, with a wide-awake lynx as mascot, and the surrounding darkness filled with flying creatures—bats and owls—one of which offers him a brush. It was originally intended as a frontispiece to a portfolio of eighty etchings, which constitutes a sardonic and allegorical depiction of the moral and sexual monstrosities men and women turn into when reason dozes. For what it is worth, Goya finally chose a different self-portrait as frontispiece, in which, beneath a dandy's hat, the artist wears an expression that his contemporaries read as satirical, contemptuous and in bad humor, which pretty much sums up Hughes's sour attitude toward his homeland after the accident ("West Australian justice is to justice what West Australian culture is to culture"), which took place exactly two centuries after the first edition of Goya's great work. His film, touted as a "frank opinionated look at Australia today," was poorly received by the nation that had, until the smash-up and subsequent trial, considered Hughes a national hero. He is still, as far as I know, under indictment for reckless driving, though in fact he did go back when his only son, a sculptor, committed suicide in April 2002, at the age of 33. He has been through a terrible period of his life.

In his new book, *Goya*, Hughes says he frequently dreamt about the Spanish painter during his seven-month hospitalization, during which he underwent a dozen operations and experienced "more pain than I had imagined possible." Goya himself appeared, one might say, as one of the monsters produced by the drug-induced sleep of reason while the critic was under intensive care. "In my dream narrative he was young and something of a street tough—a *majo*, dressed, I later realized, in the bullfighter's jacket of his 1794–95 self-portrait. He had a gang of friends around him, scornful fellow *majos*, and they all judged me to be a ridiculous intruder, so far out of his depth as to be a clown." I know the gang of toughs Hughes dreamt of. They appear in *Caprichos*, Plate 11, titled *Muchachos al avio*—"Boys getting ready"—and they are certainly up to no good. Goya shows them sitting on rocks under a bare tree, cutting plugs of contraband tobacco, with a coil of rope on the ground, handy for tying up victims. Goya painted such highwaymen stripping women, or robbing stagecoaches, with kneeling figures pleading for their lives. The *muchachos* were ace marksmen, like Goya himself.

"Boys getting ready," as well as the portrait of the artist that Hughes hallucinated, was shown in 1989 in a wonderful exhibition called "Goya and the Spirit of Enlightenment," with venues in Boston and New York, where Hughes must have seen it—his review appeared at the end of January of that year in *Time*. The self-portrait, with Goya wearing the *torero* jacket, almost puns on the exhibition's title. The artist stands in front of an immense canvas like Velázquez, half-silhouetted against the light from his studio window. His unmistakable mug, with its snub nose, glowers at us from beneath the brim of a curious hat, which has candles clipped to the hatband (he liked to touch up his canvases at night). He presents himself as, literally, a bearer of light—an *ilustrado*. The Enlightenment is also highlighted in *Caprichos*, Plate 71, in which one of a small assembly of misshapen night creatures points to the night sky, and the caption reads *Si amanece, nos vamos*—"If they wake, we're out of here!" *Los Caprichos* was what we would now call a wake-up call. It was not a great success.

Many of the work's allusions, which we assume were clear to Goya's contemporaries, are matters of scholarly speculation today, but there is also a universality, an all-too-human truth to the moral reality Goya

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satirized. *Los Caprichos* is a dialogue in oppressions, lived out between generations, between classes, between the sexes and, above all, between the Inquisition and the superstitious on whom it preyed. It must especially be these images that Hughes was recalling when he wrote in his 1989 review that "we see his face pressed to the glass of our terrible century, mouthing to make his warnings understood." My sense is that he resolved to write a book about Goya that would help a modern audience grasp these messages, but getting to know what Goya actually meant turned out to be a greater challenge than he anticipated. It was, he now believes, only through the automobile accident and his "extreme pain, fear, and despair" that he was finally able to complete the task. "It may be that the writer who does not know fear, despair, and pain cannot fully know Goya."

So far as Hughes's life in these past few years allows itself to be fitted into the good news/bad news format, the good news is that the book is now here. "Perhaps," Hughes writes philosophically, "if life is fully experienced, there is no waste." It would be grotesque to say, however good the book, that it was worth the pain that made it finally possible. So how good a book is it? Are the *muchachos* right that the critic is so far out of his depth to have become a clown? Or was that just a tormenting dream-thought?

I do not know that it is possible to "fully know" Goya, however much one has suffered. But Hughes's book probably brings us as close to this inscrutable artist as we are likely to get. "What was he 'really' like? We do not know and never will. No diaries, no letters, no self-disclosure: a seamless, expressionless, and polished mask that gives us virtually no grip on the paintings he made." Beyond that, "the last half of his life was lived out under the shadow of a crippling disability...the dreadful and unconditional loneliness of the deaf man." Inevitably, there is a thick accretion of myth, which Hughes has had to dismantle. There was, it turns out, no torrid romance between the artist and the Duchess of Alba, however Goya's portrait of her, in which she points to "Solo Goya" written in the sand at her feet, is to be interpreted. *The Naked Maja*, popularly believed to be a portrait of her, is of a different woman altogether.

Nothing can be taken for granted with Goya's work. Consider a painting of 1791, one of many designs Goya did for the royal tapestry looms. It shows four amused young women in prim lacy aprons, holding the corners of a cloth while tossing a straw dummy in the air at their whim. Hughes writes that it is "Goya's acid comment on the power of women over men, and on what seemed to him the waning of traditional Spanish masculinity." I see no independent

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"The sleep of reason produces monsters" (from *Los Caprichos*)

evidence that masculinity was waning—just think of *los muchachos*. The power of women over men is a universal theme: In *Los Caprichos*, the same little smiles of erotic gratification reappear on the faces of courtesans pulling the guts out through the anus of plucked males, as tiny as chickens. Goya's men and women re-enact the same comedies of sexual politics that still animate *Sex and the City*.

But Hughes is particularly good on the political reality of being a court painter in Goya's time. "One of the abiding mysteries of Goya seems to be that so fiery a spirit... could ever have adapted not just occasionally but consistently, for more than forty years, to the conditions of working for the successive Bourbon courts." It is exceedingly difficult, for example, for viewers today not to believe that Goya is winking at us from around the edges of his canvas, standing behind the family of Carlos IV in the famous portrait of 1800, as if enlisting our sympathy for the plight of the court painter, having to paint such ninnies. Few visitors to the Prado can forbear wondering how the artist was able to "get away with" showing the "royals" as so coarsely human. It is hard not to see the great painting as a piece of satire and social criticism, and in the spirit of *Los Caprichos*, done the year before. But "there isn't the slightest evidence in the painting of any satirical intent," Hughes writes, pointing out that "if it had contained any detectable barbs, Goya's career as first painter portraitist would have been finished there and then."

But this makes it almost impossible to imagine how the painting would have been seen two centuries ago. Or, for that matter, how anything by Goya would have been seen if the visual evidence is so dissonant with what we would suppose it to be, seeing the work as we do. This makes the body of Goya's work an intelligence test for art critics. In my view, Hughes had to overcome his characteristic impulses as writer and move with a far more measured tread than that upon which his immense reputation as a writer has rested. I think that explains why the book was so hard for him to write. In his dream, Goya had fastened a prosthetic device to Hughes's leg like an instrument of torture. "I had hoped to 'capture' Goya in writing, and he instead imprisoned me. My ignorant enthusiasm had dragged me into a trap from which there was no evident escape."

Goya was an *ilustrado* in a world in desperate need of light. Part of his work cast light on victims of the dark—the insane, the tortured, the ignorant, the disenfranchised. That does not mean Goya had contempt for the monarchy, which took its privileges as underwritten by God. He was a patriot as well as a critic, and genuinely torn when the French, bearers of Enlightenment as well as of imperialist values, invaded Spain in 1808. In this, the Peninsular War resembles the war in Iraq today. Goya's harrowing suite of etchings, *Disastres de la guerra*, unpublished in his lifetime, is unparalleled as a monument to inhumanity. Hughes has composed a picture of art and agony, and cleared away much that impedes our understanding of a great artist. However "modern," Goya still escapes our grasp. Not all of the monstrosities that haunted his dreams haunt ours. Still, this is an impressive achievement. ■

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Growing Up All Wrong

KEITH GESSEN

YELLOW DOG. By Martin Amis. Miramax. 340 pp. $24.95.

Martin Amis is the most condescended-to novelist of his time. He is also one of the most literate, funny, quotable and (this the condescenders never neglect to mention) talented. He is the author of a few clunkers and a very strange book on Stalin, *Koba the Dread*, but also of two classics of contemporary satire—*Money* and *The Information*. "Be more funny!" Homer Simpson yells at the television, and it's no use. But then, no writer has loused up his fiction with such a transparent misunderstanding of what literature should aspire to in our time.

To have watched Amis these past five years, since approximately the short-story collection *Heavy Water*, is to have borne uncomfortable witness to a sort of extended creative meltdown. In that time he has published a memoir, *Experience*, in which some funny and very warm reminiscences of his father, the novelist Kingsley Amis, are interspersed with passages of embarrassing, misplaced bathos; *Koba*, in which some funny and warm reminiscences of Kingsley are interspersed with passages of embarrassing, misplaced historical score-settling; and now *Yellow Dog*, a novel of embarrassingly transparent and misplaced moral grandstanding in which Kingsley, alas, does not appear.

He is replaced in *Yellow Dog* by a rogues' gallery of disappointing predictability. There is Xan Meo, the reformed London roughhouser turned good family man who takes a hard knock on the head and reverts to his old ways; there is Clint Smoker, author of the nasty, rape-cheering "Yellow Dog" column for a sex tabloid, the *Morning Lark*; King Henry IX, a particularly vapid monarch; and Joseph Andrews, a crusty old criminal overlord. The characters' trajectories are only loosely, vaguely connected, and their names do not signify (Xan is not Asian, his wife, Russia, not Russian). If the book has a subject it's the war of the sexes and, loosely, vaguely, what pornography might have to do with it. In any case, it hardly matters. *Yellow Dog* is shorter than it appears, because it's written largely in dialogue, and though the first part of it is readable enough, by the second half Amis has resorted to stealing whole sentences from his journalism, and the novel has fallen apart.

What remains is Amis's disapproval of everyone involved. It's not enough that Clint Smoker works for an offensive paper: His writing is off-the-charts bad, and he's also, as his ex-girlfriend informed him, "a crap fuck." It's not enough that King Henry is a dullard: We learn that his wife, the queen, is in a coma, and he's having an affair. Amis does not like pornography, and he believes, rather strenuously, that men should be respectful of women's rights. Sometimes, momentarily, he unreins his wit, only to harness it again. "Even before the first issue had hit the streets," we learn of Clint Smoker's paper, "it was universal practice, at the *Morning Lark*, to refer to readers as wankers. This applied not only to specific features (Wankers' Letters, Our Wankers Ask the Questions, and so on), but also in phrases common to any newspapering concern, such as 'the wanker comes first' and 'the wanker's what it's all about' and 'is this of genuine interest to our wankers?' The staff had long stopped smiling when anybody said it."

This is the best joke in the book—and yet note, at the end, the strain of disapproval. Amis's satire has always had a heckling quality, and too often it's been directed at his social inferiors; his fiction has always been marred by a streak of misanthropy. In his putative maturity, though, this has been replaced by a sort of taunting, as if these morons, these deviants, these inadequates, were no longer even worth our laughter.

Amis has grown up before. In the wake of *Money*, his coruscating anti-1980s farce, he became concerned with nuclear weapons, producing a string of essays and then *Einstein's Monsters* (1987), a short book of stories all somehow touching on the nuclear threat. This was followed a few years hence by *Time's Arrow*, about a Nazi doctor (remember the Nazi doctors?) living in the American suburbs. Amis's successive enthusiasms can be traced in his father's letters. Martin "has

Keith Gessen last wrote for The Nation *on Jeffrey Eugenides's novel* Middlesex.

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gone all lefty and of the crappiest neutralist kind," Kingsley Amis writes in 1986 to his friend Robert Conquest, the great historian of Stalin's terror, "challenging me to guess how many times over the world can destroy itself.... I suppose you can't recommend some book?" "Martin is getting het up again over greenhouse effect and all that," he writes to Conquest in 1990. "Can you recommend a good short book..."

Presumably Kingsley, Communist Party of Great Britain, 1941–56, subsequently a virulent Tory anti-Communist, would have been more tolerant of *Koba the Dread*, and he wouldn't have had to solicit bibliographic advice, because Conquest, along with Solzhenitsyn, is the book's main source. Also Vladimir Nabokov, who, as Amis's favorite writer, gets to be the historian of record for prerevolutionary Russia. Even in a book as full of misprision as *Koba*, this is too much: The literary theorist Roman Jakobson is famously said to have objected, when Nabokov was proposed as a potential literature professor for the Harvard faculty, that one did not ask an elephant to teach zoology, but giving Nabokov the last word on the paradise of czarist Russia is like having the elephant teach Russian history. Still, skewed as it is, *Koba* is revealing of Amis. He simply isn't interested, as a novelist might be, in the texture, the daily fear, of Soviet life under Stalin, still less in the heartbreak of those whose dream of revolution had been hijacked by the Bolsheviks; he is only interested in the enormous numbers, the gruesome tortures, the twisted torturer himself.

And this gets to the heart, I think, of Amis's trouble, and all that condescension he is subject to: He still doesn't know what his subject is. So he goes in desperate search of the really ultra-super-real. In *The Information*, a book about literary envy and the humiliations of middle age, both encapsulated with awesome precision in the characterization of failed novelist Richard Tull—"he was forty tomorrow, and reviewed books"—there are entire sections, by far the book's weakest and enough of them to pull the novel off its center of gravity, devoted to the London petty-criminal world. Also brief digressions on the size of the universe—how tremendously big it is. In the wildly uneven memoir *Experience*, a book about Kingsley, and, magnificently at times, about aging ("Youth can perhaps be defined as the illusion of your own durability. The final evaporation of this illusion parches the skin beneath the eyes and makes your hair crackle to the brush. It was over. There would be hell to pay"), there are long passages about Martin's cousin Lucy, who

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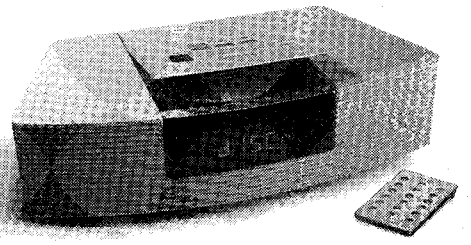

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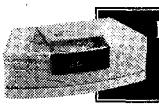

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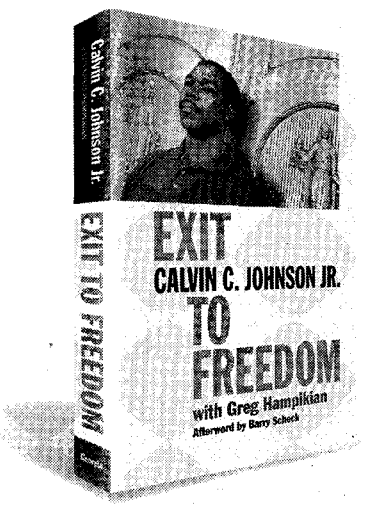

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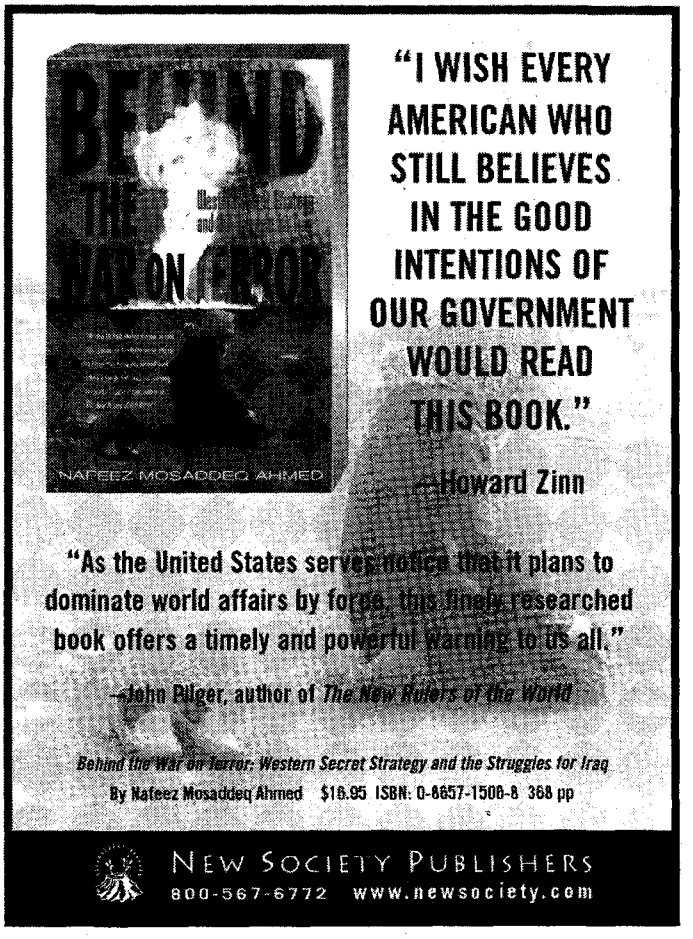
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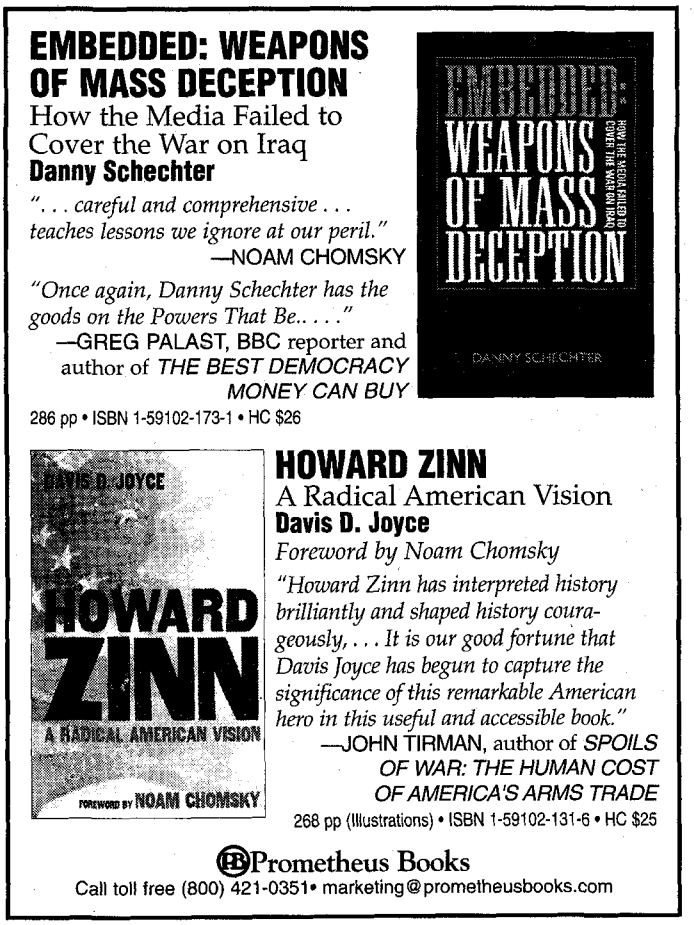
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was murdered by a famous serial killer in the early 1970s. The trouble is that Amis hardly knew his cousin, and so these parts read like an awkward, very general funeral oration by someone only glancingly acquainted with the deceased.

But Amis thinks this is the stuff. Crime, nuclear war, Holocaust, the gulag, universe expanding, petty crime, hard-boiled lumpen London—*Yellow Dog* is especially full of the latter—all of these seem infinitely more real to Amis than literature and middle age and money. Is Amis ever better than when looking at the social stratification of New York, "the most violent thing that men had ever done to a stretch of land"? The hungover John Self in *Money*:

> I wondered, as I burped up Broadway, I wondered how this town ever got put together. Some guy was dreaming big all right. Starting down in Wall Street and nosing ever upward into the ruins of the old West Side, Broadway snakes through the island, the only curve in this world of grids. Somehow Broadway always contrives to be just that little bit shittier than the zones through which it bends. Look at the East Village: Broadway's shittier than that. Look uptown, look at Columbus: Broadway's shittier.

A fine observation on the construction of the metropolis, on its insistent, compulsive geographic class-marking. Sadly, you sense that Amis thinks this isn't important enough, and will soon be reaching again for his lumpens. *Money* includes an entirely superfluous subplot about John Self's father, who owns a bar, and his young stepmother, who poses nude for magazines.

This is known as a crisis of confidence in one's material, and Amis seems to suffer one in every book he writes. Part of the crisis is generational: No one has been in a better position to feel his contemporaries' inadequacies vis-à-vis their fathers than the son of Kingsley Amis, head of the postimperial grouch brigade. "Dad," asks young Martin in *Experience*, "are we nouveau riche?" "*Very* nouveau," answers Kingsley. "And *not at all* riche." "What's it like," asks adult Martin, "being mildly anti-Semitic?" "It's all right," answers Kingsley. ("No," earnest Martin clarifies, "I mean what's it *feel* like?") I cannot imagine Martin Amis answering any such questions with Kingsley's genial certainty. He is a far more displaced and fidgety figure. Also a diminished one. The empire is gone, long gone, and it's not easy being a major contemporary writer if you don't believe you live in a major contemporary culture.

Or even that you practice a major contemporary art. "Like all writers," Amis tells us in *The Information* of Richard Tull, "Richard wanted to live in some hut on some crag somewhere, every couple of years folding a page into a bottle and dropping it limply into the spume. Like all writers, Richard wanted, and expected, the reverence due, say, to the Warrior Christ an hour before Armageddon." Instead, he is a complete loser, and in the way that you can tell what an author thinks of an idea by the characters he assigns to believe in it, Richard Tull represents Amis's secret suspicion that literature is doomed.

This is actually an odd form of humility. When Amis rather grandly titles his (very smart) collection of book reviews *The War Against Cliché*, he does not mean what Orwell or, in a certain reading, Nabokov would have meant—a war against the euphemisms that lend cover to murder. Amis's understanding appears to be closer to a private morality of entertainment. Keep it

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interesting, keep it moving. Don't use the same word twice. When in doubt, make it un-literary.

But Amis was born into a peculiar situation—one in which his writerly self-consciousness was mirrored, anticipated, swallowed up by his father's writerly self-consciousness...and his stepmother's, and his father's friends'. In *Experience*, there is an incredible passage in which Amis analyzes his father's divorce from the writer Elizabeth Jane Howard, with the (dubious) help of Kingsley's first biographer, Eric Jacobs, whose prose Amis calls "mysteriously repetitive." You could go crazy untangling all the writerly distortions. Or there is this footnote, about Kingsley and *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*: "How he loved that dictionary—as I too love it. My current edition has just snapped in half and will have to be replaced. When it was near by and he was praising it ('This, this is the one'), he would sometimes pat and even stroke the squat black book, as if it were one of his cats."

Kingsley is Amis's greatest character, his most complex and comic, by about a mile; nowhere, not in his letters, or interviews, or biographies, or even maybe his own books, is Kingsley this funny or likable. "My father once told Christopher Hitchens and me to fuck off after we took him to Leicester Square to see *Beverly Hills Cop*. No: he liked it and we didn't. And I think we must have curled our lips at him. Most uncharacteristically he walked away on his own and had to be coaxed into the next pub or cab."

Would Amis be a worse writer if he simply surrendered to his fate—to be a major chronicler of modern civilization as experienced by a hypereducated and marginalized literary elite? It's difficult to escape the impression that part of the reason Kingsley is such a fine character is that Amis cannot pretend that he is other than he is, a littérateur. How should one write when one's greatest tenderness is reserved for a man whose greatest tenderness is reserved for his copy of the *COD*? Perhaps, rather than writing like this, as in *Yellow Dog*, relating one thug's intimidation of a hot-dog vendor:

> "Look, you don't want your face on that grill, do you, you don't want this trolley down on you and them onions in your hair. And a squirt of ketchup up one ear. And a squirt of mustard up the fucking other."

one ought to write like this, as in *The Information* when Richard takes the vacuum cleaner to get fixed:

> By the time he got the vacuum cleaner out of the apartment and onto the stairs Richard was wondering if he had ever suffered so. This, surely, is how we account for the darkness and the helpless melancholy of twentieth-century literature. These writers, these dreamers and seekers, stood huddled like shivering foundlings on the cliffs of a strange new world: one with no servants in it.

Here is the disappointment, almost even the fury. At moments like these Amis is simply the finest contemporary novelist of cultural manners, of the status that civilization has in our society, and he is capable, when necessary, of taking it a step further. "By a certain age, everyone has the face he deserves," thinks Richard Tull. "Looking in the mirror on the morning of his fortieth birthday, Richard felt that no one deserved the face he had. No one in the history of the planet." And better still, in *Money*, the book whose themes *Yellow Dog* picks up but travesties, John Self looks at the fictional "Martin Amis": "If I stare into his face

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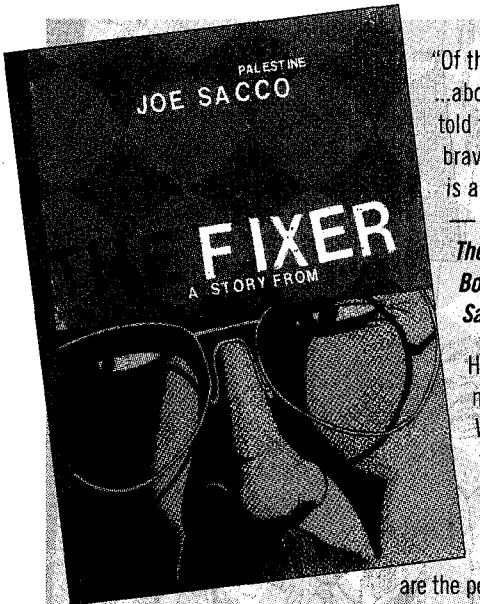

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I can make out the areas of waste and fatigue, the moonspots and bone-shadow you're bound to get if you hang out in the twentieth century."

That is Amis's twentieth century. In *Koba the Dread*, he quotes voluminously from another's twentieth century, *The Gulag Archipelago*—indeed, it's part of the silliness of that book that he so insistently tries to share page-time with Solzhenitsyn. But I wonder how well he understood the dissident writer. For although Amis is correct to insist that the Soviet labor camps were effectively death camps, Solzhenitsyn's book is necessarily about those millions who made it out—and how unnaturally old they'd become, how badly their teeth had rotted. When Amis is at his best, the twentieth century becomes a place where those without money are left with the wrinkles and the broken vacuum cleaners: a forbidding century, and one that Solzhenitsyn, with a little prompting, would have recognized as his own. And if he hadn't recognized it, if he'd dismissed as frivolous an observation like John Self's in the wake of his financial ruin—"Manhattan, JFK, you know these are suddenly very different places when you have no money. You change, but they change too. Even the air changes"—then so much the worse for Solzhenitsyn. A truly grown-up Amis would realize this, and in doing so would realize, too, how fine a writer he has sometimes been. ■

Ears Wide Open

RUSSELL PLATT

GYÖRGY LIGETI: Music of the Imagination. By Richard Steinitz. Northeastern. 429 pp. $35.

THE LIGETI PROJECT: Volumes I–IV. Schönberg Ensemble, Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, Reinbert de Leeuw and Jonathan Nott, conductors. Teldec/Warner Classics.

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It's a cliché to say that an artist draws his power from his contradictions, but the lives of the great composers provide easy grist for the mill. Ives, living an outwardly respectable life as an Ivy League–educated New York insurance executive, turned from Jekyll to Hyde in his off hours, writing a rude and shocking type of music that the world is still trying to absorb. Schönberg, the conservative progressive, thought himself forced by fate to push Romantic music, which everyone loved, into the woolly world of Modernism, which almost everyone hated. Beethoven, music's great idealist, wrote music that sang majestically of universal brotherhood, while enduring a personal life of crushing loneliness. The list goes on.

At first glimpse, György Ligeti appears to reflect this familiar pattern. As Richard Steinitz writes in his new biography (which arrives in America just before the end of the Hungarian composer's eightieth-birthday year): "Ligeti is a dreamer who is a meticulous technician, a creator of mechanisms who believes in intuition, an insatiable explorer who is mercilessly self-critical, a hater of ideologies, a profound intellectual who is sensitive, witty, self-deprecating and devoid of pomposity." He is also a man who has lived through harrowing times, so much so that one is tempted to hear the combination of horror and humor in his music—never more manifest than in his *magnum opus*, the opera *Le Grand Macabre*, in which the worlds of Bosch and Breughel lie down as lion and lamb—as we do the bitter ironies of Shostakovich, another tortured genius from the Eastern bloc.

But Steinitz—a British composer, academic and new-music impresario—knows better, and after sampling Ligeti's music, played with astonishing expertise by some of Europe's leading performers in a series of discs on the Warner Classics label, so do we. There may be a handful of composers still living who can match Ligeti's achievement (Pierre Boulez and Elliott Carter most quickly come to mind), but none of them are more deserving of the honor of a complete edition of recordings—which Warner, picking up the baton from Sony Classics, has recently finished. (The fifth and final volume of the Warner set is scheduled to be released in spring 2004.) In the midst of a dislocated life in a misbegotten century, Ligeti has created a body of music that, with a few exceptions, maintains an underlying serenity of purpose even while it indulges a taste for the ghoulish and the macabre. As a victim of Soviet domination, the young Ligeti was not free to choose the direction in which his music could go, but the sheer scope of his vision was apparent even from the beginning—a vision that would expand to embrace the influences of Boulezian serialism, Cageian chance techniques, American minimalism and the crazy, serried rhythmic schemes of the player-piano composer Conlon Nancarrow. Much of Steinitz's book is made up of analysis, but unlike so many composer studies, the descriptive sections are so well written and metaphorically articulate that an intelligent reader will know what to take and what to leave behind. He devotes some forty pages to analyzing the workings of Ligeti's three books of piano études—which makes sense, as these richly varied, virtuosic and delectable works have become some of his most popular and accessible pieces.

You won't find much detail about Ligeti's life in Steinitz's book, which, he says, "was not intended to be" a biography, but which became one as the writer warmed to his subject. The founder and former artistic director of Britain's Huddersfield Contemporary Music Festival (long a renowned showcase for the most intrepid of modern composers), Steinitz first met Ligeti in 1973, and his book, *Music of the Imagination*, is an official biography in all but name: Ligeti not only welcomed Steinitz into his Hamburg home for three days of interviews but checked the book's first draft, making corrections the writer duly incorporated into his text. So it's no surprise that Steinitz, by his own admission, has touched on Ligeti's personal life only insofar as it will illuminate the composer's music, the topics including "his relationship with his mother, his continued distress concerning the murder of his father and brother [by the Nazis], the circumstances of his three marriages to only two people, his generous advocacy of little known composers, personal warmth and professional scepticism." Andrew Clark, in a review of the book's European edition, describes Ligeti (whom he once interviewed himself) as "a restless, obsessive, almost childlike figure who shields himself within an emotional/psychological world of his own making, for the fulfillment of his extraordinary creative talent." This, too, is a twentieth-century cliché, and I would hesitate to apply it to a Jew who successfully survived the Holocaust and a Hungarian who escaped the Russian onslaught against his country in 1956 by hiding under mail sacks and dodging border guards.

Russell Platt is a composer and an editor at The New Yorker.

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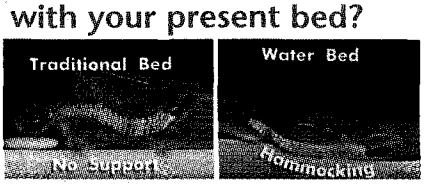

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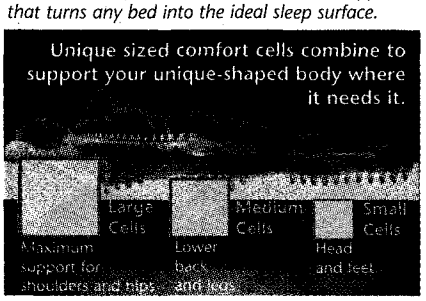
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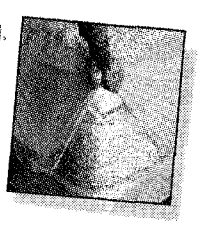

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But there is certainly much more to the man. An incident in the composer's second home in the Vienna Woods in 1996 might indicate a self-destructive streak: As Steinitz delicately puts it, Ligeti's "careless inattention to his naked-flame tea-heater" not only burned the first floor of the house but almost consumed the score of *Le Grand Macabre*, which he had spent several months revising in anticipation of an upcoming Salzburg Festival production. His personal life after his divorce from his second wife, Vera (they remain close friends), is dispatched in a paragraph, and there are no photographs of Vera or of their son Lukas, who has become an esteemed avant-garde musician (and public figure) in his own right; Ligeti's years of deprivation in postwar Hungary are relayed with affecting simplicity, yet it is somehow unbelievable to read that even after a decade of living in the West as a famous composer he could not afford to own a piano until a patron gave him one in the late 1960s. He still lives in Hamburg, retired from teaching and free to pursue his prestigious commissions. But there must be more to Ligeti than a disheveled old man with a taste for crazy sweaters.

So we look for patterns. One that manifests itself early is a resistance to authority, an artist's escape into dreams, which he can use as fuel. Taunted by a sadistic aunt, he elaborates an arachnophobic nightmare from childhood (he is prevented from reaching his bed by a dense, rotten web of insects and human detritus that knots and unwinds with "the hopelessness of passing time") that influences the structure of *Apparitions* (1958), the groundbreaking orchestral work that would make his reputation in the West. An uncle in his Hungarian hometown works in a printing press, the mechanistic inevitability of its sounds providing a spark much later for the *Poème symphonique* (1962), a kind of "happening" scored for one hundred metronomes. While the work's hilariously pompous title doffs its hat to the neodada Fluxus movement fashionable at the time, in performance the effect of the blank-faced metronomes winding down to their ticking deaths, one by one, is just as frightful as it is funny—a prime example of the double reality that is the essence of Ligeti's work.

Having survived the Nazis and escaped from the grip of the Communists, Ligeti greedily learns the resources of "The New Music" from new friends like Stockhausen and Boulez, but soon grows restive with their authoritarian theology of serialist composition. In *Apparitions* Ligeti deploys for the first time his technique of "micropolyphony," in which multiple strands of imitative counterpoint are layered upon each other in a dense, undulating fabric; one year later he reinvents himself in *Atmosphères*, a work that eschews the twelve-tone technique for the pleasures of sculpting sound, its large-scale rhythms built exclusively on washes of tone color that move about the orchestra in great sheets and blocks. A work of both precision and sensuality, it brings him international success. In his Requiem (1963–65) he exhumes the ghosts of his painful past in shattering music at once forbiddingly complex (the choral parts are among the most difficult ever composed) and emotionally hysterical; an early recording catches the ear of Stanley Kubrick, who without permission or payment uses music from both the Requiem and the *Lux aeterna* (a dreamy, haunting, one-movement choral work that Ligeti composed while struggling with postoperative morphine addiction) in the soundtrack for *2001: A Space Odyssey*. The composer gets fleeced (MGM, after a six-year legal tussle, pays him a mere $3,500) but comes to respect the adventurous and brilliant Kubrick, who goes on to pay Ligeti handsomely for the use of his music in *The Shining* and *Eyes Wide Shut*. Steinitz relates this famous tale with a tactful mixture of probity and zest; he also goes into considerable depth to relate the much more important story of how the half-complete "Ligeti Edition" got bumped from Sony Classics to Warner Classics' Teldec label. (The composer, not always a charmer in the recording sessions with the absurdly overworked Philharmonia Orchestra, refused to approve the release of Esa-Pekka Salonen's recordings of the Requiem and other major works, effectively shutting down the Sony project after eight impressive volumes, all still available—and beautifully done.)

Ligeti's music maintains an underlying serenity of purpose even while it indulges a taste for the ghoulish and macabre.

As we listen to the fruits of the Teldec CDs, a theme that Ligeti struck in a lecture soon after the premiere of the Requiem provides a necessary context in which to hear his later work. With the decline of classical forms, tonal schemes and rhythmic continuity, listeners can easily lose their bearings; according to the composer, the structures of contemporary works have become more like architecture than music, made of "single rooms, vast empty buildings, winding subterranean labyrinths, isolated homes spaced out in a landscape." One hates to use the word "accessibility" (a pointless term from the marketing culture that has taken over classical music in the past decade), but it does define the issue: How much does an audience have a right to expect from a composer? Volume II of the set, a collection of orchestral works played by the Berlin Philharmonic under the young British conductor Jonathan Nott, is a crucible in which to test the theory—and since the notoriously critical Ligeti approved the recordings himself, we can regard them as definitive. *Atmosphères*, a unique creation, remains deliciously indestructible, while the "landscape" of *San Francisco Polyphony* (1973-4), an audaciously contrapuntal tribute to the charisma and literate hedonism of one of his favorite cities, is constantly energized by sexy, jagged melodies reminiscent of Berg and pulsing rhythms inflected with some of the minimalist spirit that Ligeti had recently enjoyed in the music of Steve Reich and Terry Riley—and the wondrous Philharmonic is up to the task. But *Apparitions*, for all its novelty, sounds today like a parody of early electronic music, its mechanistic processes devoid of passion or wit, and the diaphanous *Lontano* (1967), for all its moody originality, has always seemed overrated to my ear. But an effective reading of the sparky Romanian Concerto, one of many fine, conservatively styled works from the 1950s that Ligeti has republished, is more than compensation, and Nott, the orchestra and the singers of London Voices give a hieratic dignity to the scarifying sounds of the Requiem that Kubrick once so deftly purloined.

Ligeti, like all composers, had to either confront or deny the new challenges posed by the collapse of serialist doctrine and the arrival of Postmodernism and Neo-Romanticism on the international scene in the 1970s and '80s. But unlike Stravinsky, whose tacking to the twelve-tone breeze in the 1950s was set off by a fear of being left behind, the transformations in Ligeti's recent style sound like a product of a generous spirit and an ever-expanding mind. The Chamber Concerto (1969–70) uses texture and color as its points of departure, but its pithy and economical multimovement form points toward later works like the Piano and Violin Concertos, energized by new passions for the rhythms of African and Caribbean folk music and, at times, an openhearted lyricism that looks back to Brahms. (The Trio for Violin, Horn and Piano, heard in the Sony series, is a supreme example of the latter tendency.) All of them are performed with radiant precision by the Dutch con-

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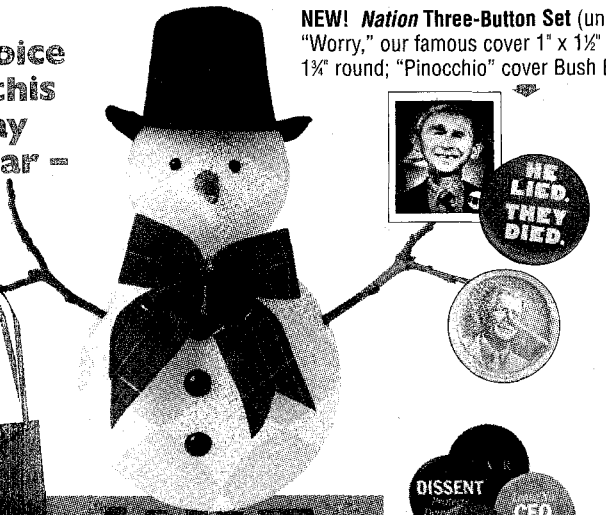

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ductor Reinbert de Leeuw and his Schönberg and Asko Ensembles. Pierre-Laurent Aimard, an extraordinary virtuoso of intense but serene commitment, is the soloist in the Piano Concerto, while Frank Peter Zimmerman, a young buck of a fiddler with ferocity to spare, gives the Violin Concerto—Ligeti's most heroically Romantic concerto—the kind of workout that ought to make it a repertory piece.

Still, Warner's *Ligeti/Reich: African Rhythms* disc—an unofficial pendant to the rest of the set—is the best introduction to Ligeti's sound and sense for a newcomer steeped in world music, techno or alternative rock. Designed by the dedicated Aimard as a high-class concept album, it positions the richly polyphonic communal songs of the Aka Pygmies—sung and played by an ensemble that Aimard brought from the Congo Basin to Berlin—so that they alternate with several of the Ligeti études, and two Steve Reich classics (*Clapping Music* and *Music for Pieces of Wood*). The result is a celebration of pulse, so seamlessly arranged that the village music, and the Western art music that its kind inspired, abide together without condescension or discomfort.

Ligeti has long championed the work of American mavericks like Reich, Riley and Nancarrow (Ligeti convinced the MacArthur Foundation to give the aging renegade, long exiled in Mexico, one of their famously lucrative "genius" grants), but listening to their works next to his gives one pause. As a bona fide European master, Ligeti can, with princely detachment, take what he likes from any available menu and use it to extend a personal interpretation of a musical tradition going back a thousand years, while even the most interesting American composers, operating in a far younger country suspicious of high art, seem driven to prove themselves by pursuing their own, iconoclastic visions. (A two-piano piece of Ligeti's from 1976—*Self-Portrait With Reich and Riley, With Chopin in the Background*—puts the whole thing in a nutshell.) American composers and culturati have spent the past two decades heatedly discussing the viability of minimalism, the relevance of world music on classical composition and the relationship of the composer to his audience—while Ligeti, above it all, has simply acted.

At the close of his biography, Steinitz informs us that Ligeti hopes, despite poor health, to compose an opera based on Alice in Wonderland, a book that might perfectly match the composer's volatile yet elegant sense of absurdity. One can only wish him the best—since he may be the last of his kind. ■

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LETTERS
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(Continued From Page 2)

100 YEARS *CAN* MAKE A DIFFERENCE

New York City

■ I was delighted that after 100 years a *Nation* critic has finally awarded Helen Keller's *The Story of My Life* the praise it deserves. Michael Bérubé's "Written in Memory" [Aug. 4/11] offers a welcome corrective to the *Nation* review of April 30, 1903, when the book was first published, which asserted that "literary sincerity is so entirely absent from it that the subject spills over from the domain of literature into that of ethics." Aside from raising interesting questions about the nature of identity and learning, the twenty-first-century review rightfully allows Keller to retain her imagination, thought and self-awareness—qualities that so many other critics denied her throughout her life. I agree with Bérubé that her story is "worth committing to our collective memory." While most people are familiar with the incident at the well, few realize that for more than forty years she championed the rights of the disabled. That legacy must not be forgotten either. CARL R. AUGUSTO
American Foundation for the Blind

HE GIVES A TOOT

Cleveland

■ I set down my horn and my *Nation* to respond to a phrase in your review of Daniel Barenboim's books ["The Unrepentant Modernist," June 16]: "interests in literature and art (interests many musicians surprisingly don't have)." You have obviously not been on tour with the Cleveland Orchestra. A few years ago we were in Madrid with only three hours free before our concert. In that short period about half the orchestra visited the Prado. The appreciation of art has had a clear influence on my interpretation of music. I state with confidence that many musicians do have an interest in literature and art. HANS CLEBSCH
Third horn, the Cleveland Orchestra

WOODSMAN, SPARE THAT TREE

Portland, Ore.

■ Your Spring Books cover [June 16] sports a literary, pipe-smoking tweedy type swinging an ax to cut down a big tree. Apparently he's thinking of the books that will come from the wood, since there hovers in his thought cloud a venerable-looking tome. But here in the Northwest we know that the timber beasts felling our trees don't work with literary intent. The only book they think of is the checkbook.
JOHN MARKS

CLARIFICATION

■ In last week's editorial "Dean With a Small 'd,'" we mentioned Dick Gephardt's refusal to sign a campaign-reform pledge. The pledge, which strengthens public financing for future elections, is not binding for the upcoming primaries. Gephardt claims it should be.

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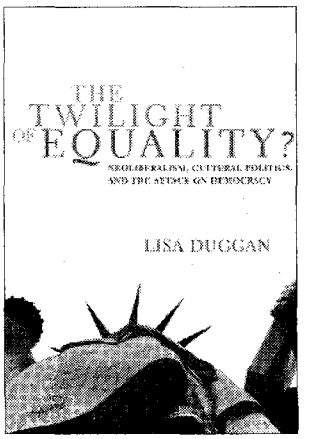

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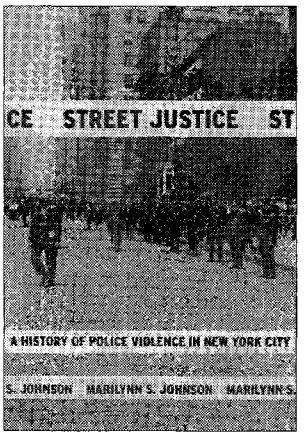

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Race & Labor Matters

■ CUNY Graduate Center, December 4–5. Join leading labor leaders and scholars to reframe the relationship between race and labor, and consider significant economic, social, historical and political conditions, and dynamics of racial injustice in the labor force. Topics include: race and immigration, community coalitions, organizing, globalization, antiracism, union democracy, gender and building a new social movement. Speakers include: Bill Fletcher, Juan Gonzalez, Robin Kelley, Manning Marable, Ruth Needleman, Adolph Reed, Roger Toussaint. Call (212) 966-4248, ext. 218, see www.raceandlabor.org.

PEN American Center

■ "Mind The Gap! Writers Eye the US/European Cultural Divide," with Tariq Ali, Jane Kramer, Bernard Henri Levy, Peter Schneider and Carles Torner, moderated by Ian Buruma. Thursday, December 4, at Florence Gould Hall (55 East 59th Street). Presented by PEN American Center, Centre Catala del PEN Club and the New York Institute for the Humanities. Tickets are $10 (free for students) and available at the Alliance Française box office: (212) 355-6160. For more information call PEN at (212) 334-1660, ext. 107.

WASHINGTON, DC

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The advertising deadline for Events is every Monday. Rates: $150 for up to 50 words; $225 for up to 75 words. To place an ad, call Ken at (212) 209-5414.

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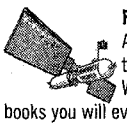

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THE BROWARD COUNTY, FL, *NATION* DISCUSSION GROUP is looking for members. For further information please contact Bob Bellinson. Call (954) 977-9569, e-mail bob@fl1.powerflite.net.

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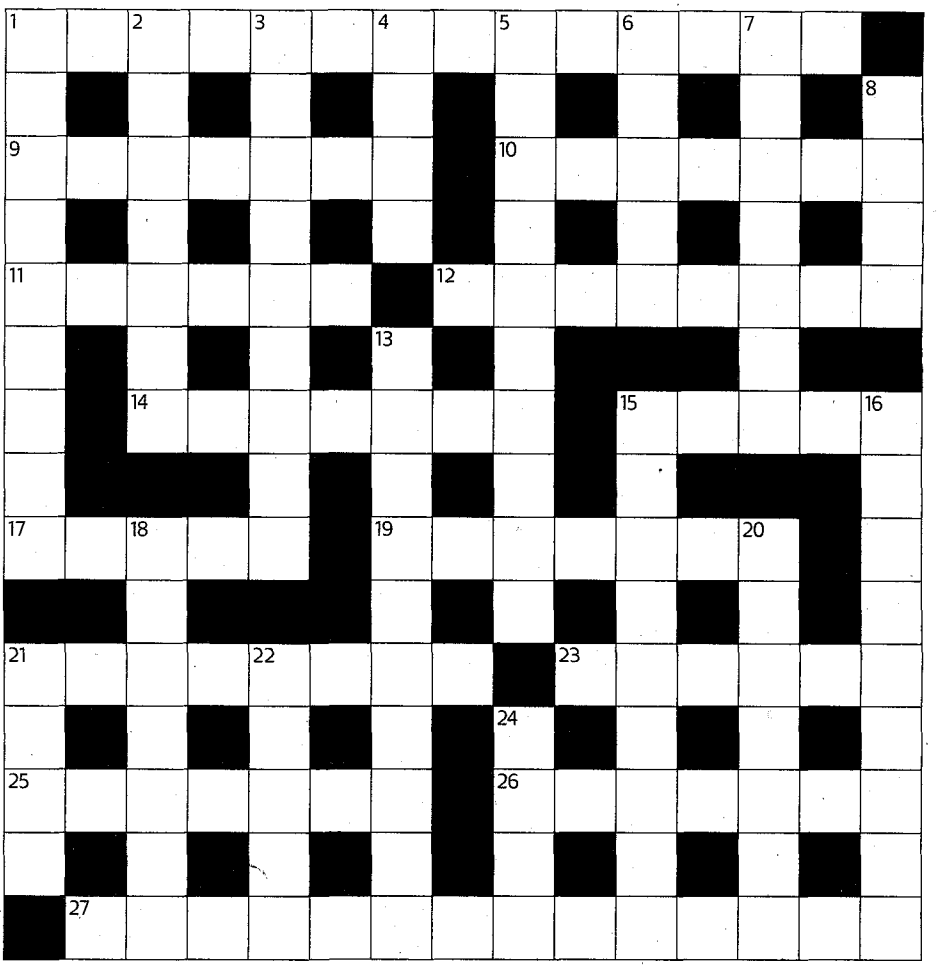

ACROSS

1 You hear it's the way one may call his workers, but one doesn't do it to keep them dry. (5,4,5)

9 Supposedly a heavenly promise causes brain trouble which ends in a cry of pain. (7)

10 If the humor is comic enough, you will see it to be caused by one of the Moors of Spain. (7)

11 Obviously the law is broken by it, although some work hard to acquire much of it. (6)

12 Sounds like the Chicken Reel, but one won't get to 15 across with it. (4,4)

14 What the British do to people, with a lift. (7)

15 Causes a loud stir, in a way—but no one is ahead of you, if you are. (5)

17 What one with a burning desire is likely to be responsible for (sounds like the child of you and me). (5)

19 Is it an old way to get a nice tan? (7)

21 Certainly not the correct method to warn one of the fact that there may be oncoming traffic here. (5,3)

23 See 4 down

25 It starts out by wondering why I am so sad, but folk tales involve a bunch of flowers. (7)

26 A onetime Mexican leader is second-class, found in such a state! (7)

27 Would one have to scale his talk this way, being very careful about the content? (5,4,5)

DOWN

1 and **21** What probate lawyers have to do when they are eager to get on with it? (4,4,1,4)

2 Flatter in the extreme, as they say, if one does. (7)

3 The sailor gets sort of wet, even in the old-fashioned way—perhaps calling for an intermediary. (2-7)

4 and **23** across Evidently the story is to be taken as given, when papers are available at such places. (10)

5 Once lemons might have caused drowsiness, it appears. (10)

6, **8** and **24** A monthly 15 across presentation of what is meant to be funny. (5,4,4)

7 Perhaps aspired to change what one was hopelessly filled with. (7)

8 See 6 down

13 In Surinam, is it equal to a French husband? Peep, perhaps, at the end of it! (10)

15 What one might be entitled to if there is a 12 at court but no dance. (4,5)

16 You old-fashioned types on the desert, as they say, should be very numerous. (9)

18 Perhaps COs have the desire to use a whip! (7)

20 An article in great confusion, which obviously gets the bird! (7)

21 See 1

22 Where one wouldn't want to be sent, though perhaps Gaul has a great beginning here! (5)

24 See 6 down

SOLUTION TO PUZZLE NO. 2917

■	H	A	R	D	T	O	P	L	E	A	S	E	■	■
F	■	P	■	R	■	F	■	A	■	L	■	F	■	A
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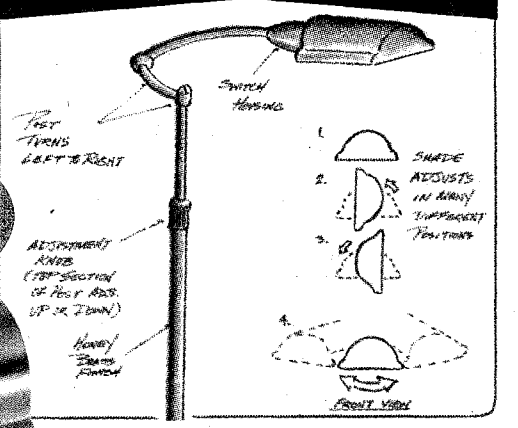
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The science of better lighting. To bring the benefits of natural daylight indoors, use the floor lamp that simulates the full spectrum of daylight. You will see with more comfort and ease as this lamp provides sharp visibility for close tasks and reduces eyestrain. Its 27-watt compact bulb is the equivalent to a 150-watt ordinary light bulb. This makes it perfect for activities such as reading, writing, sewing and needlepoint, and especially for aging eyes. For artists, the Full Spectrum Floor Lamp can bring a source of natural light into a studio, and show the true colors of a work. This lamp has an "Instant On" switch that is flicker-free. The high-tech electronics, incredible design, and a bulb that lasts five times longer than an ordinary bulb make this product a must-have.

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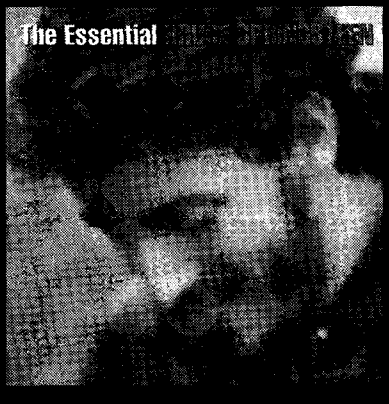
Essential Bruce Springsteen



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